The Catholic Church and Current Literature

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Editor's Preface

The connection between the Catholic Faith and Literature is more highly indirect than the connection between it and almost any other form of human effort. It is far less direct than its connection with architecture, or even with the plastic arts, and obviously less direct than its connection with economics and social life. The reason of this would seem to be that the sole immediate bond between any philosophy and the literature produced under its effects (save, of course, the literature directly regarding that philosophy) is a negative bond. A philosophy comprehending a system of ethics prevents certain things from being written and certain aspects - false aspects - from being entertained. But it does not directly produce one particular mood colouring all letters. Indeed, it is remarkable that in all the long history of Christendom there has been more freedom and more change in literary mood than in that of any other culture we know of. In which connection we may further remark (and it is very important that both we and our opponents should remember it) that the mind is more free within the framework of the Catholic Church than within any other. It is an experience constantly felt and occasionally expressed, but one which seems so astonishing to those outside that it is in their ears even worse than a paradox.

Apart, however, from this freedom of mood which has given to the literature of the European civilisation so much fecundity and such infinite diversity since the conversion of the Roman Empire to Catholicism, there are certain permanent characters attaching to Christian literature or to literature written under Christian influences (Rabelais, Shakespeare, Victor Hugo - three names taken deliberately because each is within the framework, although in opposition) and those characters combine under the term Form. The literature of Christendom achieved Form by its devotion to tradition, and it achieved form by its feeling of universality.

Now here your fool will object that tradition must cramp diversity, and that a spirit of universality will destroy the individual note and the variety of place, author and time. It is just the other way. The maintenance of tradition supports the mind in its extravagance and

even its vagaries, and most of all in its creative impulse. It is the abandonment of tradition which makes for sterility and death. Nor is the reason far to seek. Within the respect for tradition all the creative side of man's mind is set free. It is not creative to turn things upside down, or to seek in vain for something that nobody has ever said before, or to look about for a mode of expression which shall shock and startle because it has no relation to the mass and momentum of human experience in the arts. So far from being a creative factor, this breach with tradition is a crippling one; it is an expense of effort in futility, and you may note that when the man or woman has undertaken that expense of effort, their production becomes valueless and repetitive. There is nothing so drearily alike as your modern English pornographic novels, principally written by maiden ladies; nothing more deathly boring, and utterly upon one dull pattern, than the tomfool zigzags of that decoration which springs from the morals of Berlin. There is more multiplicity in one landscape of Poussin or one lyric of Keats or one sonnet of Ronsard than in the whole mass of the modern revolt put together. For what is creative is the soul: and the soul is Form.

The same is true of Universality. That note which we inherited from the noble Pagan antiquity and which we have vivified under the baptism of the Catholic Church, that large comprehension of what is common to all men because it is intimate to each, that vision of the manifold which cannot be so much as glimpsed unless a man appreciate Unity, has been the peculiar dower of Letters since the Faith came to illuminate the West. All our masterpieces are universal. But with the failure of Form, with what I have called "the modern revolt," that Universality disappears. We are asked to call a thing a masterpiece when its essence consists in one tiny bit of examination - usually the examination of a most unworthy object - and when that examination is dignified by the term "analysis."

Now it is not so that the permanent human things are constructed, or that we fall into touch with the Eternal. In proof of this observe the ridiculous fate of reputations attaching to those devoted to such methods. For some ten years (with luck for fifteen) they are gods - and then nobody can read them. Observe also this nice piece of magic, that when you are universal you can (I do not say you always do) touch the inmost nerve. The microscopic examiners

never touch it. There is not a phrase in these rebels and anarchists which comes within a thousand miles of: "And he gave the body of Sarpedon to-the twin Gods Death and Sleep, who bare him back to his father's land of Lycia, a broad and pleasant land."

Or again: "that ancient river, the river Kishon" (the operative word is "ancient").

Or again: "*Sero amavi pulchritudinem sero cognovi sapientiam*."

Or again: "*Ubi magnitudo ibi Veritas*."

Or again: "But still the blood is strong, the hearts are highland, And we in dreams behold the Hebrides."

One might go on for ever. . . .

Well, the great matter to be noted is that against Form, and therefore against Tradition and Universality there is active rebellion afoot. The hunt is up - but civilisation is the quarry. If the hounds drag that quarry down, if the Catholic influence on Europe fail, and if its noble preservation of the classics fail with it, then all that we have been is ruined. We shall not have something new, but nothingness.

- *The Editor*

Foreword

The twentieth century, which is coming to understand with Professor Root that Chaucer was a loyal child of the Catholic Church, is likewise well aware that diverse famous contemporary writers have abandoned this Church for some kind of agnosticism. From Anatole France to Theodore Dreiser the names of those who have given up faith for literature are many and great enough to constitute something like a problem. On the other hand the absence of what might be termed "notable Catholic influence" in contemporary letters is, perhaps, a no less serious aspect of the same situation. The facts are inescapable, and I have no desire to negate them. But it is in some manner the business of this little book to maintain that such facts are not due to any opposition between the purposes of art - or, more narrowly, literary art - and the standards of the communion of the faithful to which Dante and Calderon, masters certainly, adhered with all their souls, but rather to two chains of circumstances alike unfortunate; first, to what may be termed a cooling of Catholic enthusiasm for one of the splendid adventures of the human spirit; and secondly, to the mistaken decision of modern culture to trust rules of human conduct which in the end distort the perspective of life and with that the vistas of art. I beg the reader to remember that here is a vast theme, much of which cannot be set forth in the armful of space allotted to me. But the truth is mighty; and so we may hope our venture will be profitable far beyond our personal deserts.

Definitions

By the Catholic Church is meant here not only the teaching authority vested in the Holy See (which after all concerns itself with literary craftsmanship only a little more than with the making of pewter plates), but also the historic communion of the faithful. To this artists and literary men have belonged as naturally and cheerfully as children belong to their mothers, developing a modus vivendi from which a curious onlooker can learn a great deal. Indeed, when this is analyzed it will be found to embody something far more important than a theory of art - a something which may be called a new form of vision or the germ of a transfiguration. I mean that under normal conditions the artist who has learned the Catholic Lesson is quite as fortunate as a twelfth-century farmer would have been who had mastered the Benedictine method of agriculture.

And what shall we call literature? Properly it ought to mean the whole product of current fancy and comment, creative imagination and philosophic insight. One must never look to the conscious stylist alone for manuscript destined to last. Of all American literature of the Civil War period we best remember a little speech by Lincoln; and Greece wrote nothing more immemorial than a soldier's inscription at the pass above Thermopylae. But, bearing present purposes in mind, let us say that literature is the record of human experience, expressed in plastic diction and visioned in the light of fundamental truths. This definition is far from perfect. Nevertheless it does take cognizance of that union of the personal with the objective which always wins our homage in good writing, it does allow for the indispensable element of good form, and it does reckon with those basic human realities - the principles of tragedy and comedy - which are not scientific formulae or philosophic axioms but conclusions self-evident to all who have looked deeply into the story of mankind.

It is immediately obvious that literature is, from one point of view, wider in extent than the Catholic Church. This is not, historically or actually, the whole of humanity, but rather the Divine form of the life of humanity. It was intended to be a society of the chosen; and

though it is eager to enroll all men, it would not be distorted in any essential way if only a bare handful accepted the invitation. Writers, on the other hand, grow where they are born, batten on the substances of a racial and linguistic tradition, mirror the age and clime to which they belong, and render with varying success the sanitary service of high art. They satisfy the quite elemental human need of ministering to our understanding of experience, and so are not radically different in significance from doctors, lawyers and merchants. Consequently the notion that there can be a specifically "Catholic" literary artist is a mistaken idea. Only after a people - and, incidentally, a time - has been refashioned according to the image proposed by the Church will it produce a craftsman who can be described as one governed by the faith. This truth is so abundantly testified to by experience that it seems odd anybody should fail to notice it.

Here, then, we find a far-reaching difference between the Catholic and the literary purpose. No one ought to be surprised to find that writing with much to recommend it from an artistic point of view is frowned upon by the Christian conscience. How can a person who consorts weekly, or daily, with the sublime interpretation of human existence offered in the Mass accept complacently the record of pagan or perverse experience? He may, indeed, read it with charity, and as a result be led with Newman to work and pray more intently for those who "live without God in the world." None of us can altogether escape evil in life or literature, and perhaps it is better so. But charity is a lofty and difficult virtue, which few of the children of God can claim with any assertiveness. Our tendency, unfortunately enough, is rather to be seduced by the vision of a life more lush and lawless than our own, wherefore it is not surprising that the Church, anxious to safeguard even the weakest of the flock, should withhold the dangerous vision in so far as that is possible.

To this inevitable and historic conflict we shall devote more attention later on. It may simply be noted here that the opposition is really very like other kinds of ethical disagreement. An unscrupulous physician might relieve the boredom of a wealthy patient with neatly administered doses of heroin or cocaine; it not unfrequently happens that a modern shyster encourages married couples to throw china and get divorces; and more than once a

canny merchant has drawn otherwise sober citizens into the slough of debt by flaunting an all too attractive piano or fur coat. In all these cases the denial interposed by the ethical conscience would be immediate and absolute. Of course it sometimes happens that a too meddlesome moralist hastens to forbid all drugs and stimulants, or in a headstrong moment dubs every lawyer a thief. We may profitably bear in mind that morals are not infrequently a most deplorable slogan!

But if the Catholic life were merely negative at any point it would in a measure fail to realize the tremendous positiveness and energy which are everywhere implicit in the life and doctrine of Christ. The Savior Himself, we may declare with all reverence, was an incomparable literary artist. It is only recently that this fact has been made wholly clear as a result of most interesting studies by a French Jesuit, Father Marcel Jousse, in the "oral literary style." He has been able to reveal precisely what, from a theoretical point of view, we should have expected to find: that Our Lord, in voicing His parables and homilies, employed with matchless skill the literary method of His race and time - the recitatrfs and improvisations still preserved, though in diminished luster, by the rabbinical tradition. Obviously an example so incomparably illustrious is sufficient proof that man can go in quest of the beatitudes and of art at the same time.

At the same time, and with no tragic cleavage of the soul. For the way in which a Christian artist, ideally speaking, adjusts himself to the world in which he lives does not differ in any essential from the manner in which the Catholic Church has absorbed the life of mankind. The "syncretic" elements in our western religion are not to be viewed with the purist as shocking survivals of paganism, or as so many flowers culled along the road for the sake of making a good impression, but as substances good in themselves assimilated by an organism functioning normally. Jean Cocteau has said that "God is the only pillow of which one never tires." Revamping this truth a little, we may aver that the Christian alone among men is capable of unlimited, perennial growth. His faith does not transcend reality; it is reality, which happens to be always something more than nature. The world of objects is the only universe in which one can find the Divine object, however privileged one may be to lift

the veil of terrestrial things. And conversely, when one has found God as Saint Francis discovered Him, one never tires of looking at the wonders He has made.

This objectivity of the Catholic world, determined first of all by the fact that faith is justified by a series of actual historical events chronicled as all other happenings are, and fortified in the second instance by a traditional philosophy which is critical and realistic, is the finest of all guarantees that the universe, without which the artist cannot exist, will be preserved for the intelligence. Nothing is so dangerous to the virtue of literature as what is now satirically dubbed "literature" - that is, the practice of retreating from the world into closed gardens made up of schematizations calculated to produce an effect, of varied sentimentalisms, of passions unleashed from the reason for the sake of witnessing what they can do in a book, of windy pretense at moralizing and strutting the laboratory platform. "Real flesh and blood," Meredith demanded, meaning I take it not some form of butcher shop but the promenade of men and women as they are. How unfortunate therefore that, whereas Christian philosophy has long since adopted as its greatest leader and model a Saint Thomas who looked frankly and unflinchingly at everything that is, something like an obsession still persists in many quarters that the Christian artist must shy behind his blinkers at every sight and smell of the cosmos!

So obvious is the naturalness with which the Catholic master conjoins faith and art in all places and times wherein Catholic life exists that the topic would be utterly stale were it not for the chaos of present-day civilization. To-day the rhythm of existence has lost its religious accent even in societies which are relatively faithful to the practice of religious worship. The solidarity of Christendom is now hardly more than the firmness of a life-line flung athwart the world. Twice only since the close of the Middle Ages has the Catholic Jerusalem, to quote the words of a poet, "blossomed in the noon-tide bells" - once, for a space, in the aftermath of the Ignatian march into a northern Europe grown sectarian, and again, less harmoniously, during the romantic era. How shall the most courageous of us forget, even during the hours of subconscious living, the hostile frontiers that now dissect the map of man? "The Christian," Paul Claudel says bluntly, "is a free man among slaves."

Yet such is the strength given to our generation that the same Claudel, visualizing the change effected in the literature and mentality of his own country by a movement of Catholic rediscovery, can declare: "We have been liberated from the slavery of the spirit in the presence of matter, from the fascination of quantity. We know once more that we are made to dominate the world, not to be dominated by it. The sun has swept into the sky anew, we have thrust the curtains aside, and we have thrown out of our rooms the plush furniture, the bibelots of the bazaar, and the ‘pallid bust of Pallas.' We know that the world is every inch a text and that it tells us humbly and gayly of its own nothingness, but also of the eternal presence of the Absolute." 8 There has, indeed, taken place a profound reawakening of Catholic confidence, of Catholic desire for victory over the world. Echoes of Dante and Aquinas, of saints and holy doctors, hum on wires as busy as any telegraph.

For the moment there does not exist anywhere (excepting possibly in France) an adequate literary fruition of this confidence. It may even be true that, from the point of view of English-speaking peoples, the energy of expression has ebbed a little since the heyday of the Oxford Movement. Nevertheless I for one am willing to believe that young men and women, remarkable for their devotion to metaphysics in the sense of probing to the depths of the Christian answers to the abiding questions about human destiny, will bring a new earnestness to the work. To them let us talk not medievalism only but rather the trinity of life, art and faith which inspired the Middle Ages as well as every other truly human era.

The Splendor of Truth

The medieval thinkers, who sat enthralled over every square inch in the puzzle of existence, had their solution for the eternal question, "What is art?" It is a most interesting answer, though much was borrowed from the writers of antiquity and restated in practice rather than in fulsome theory. Jacques Maritain has summarized it so ably, even if imaginatively perhaps, that I refer everyone who cares for such matters to him. (*Art et Scholastique*, Paris, 1920) Of course the scholastics (notably Saint Thomas) tackled the problem by reasoning from their favorite axiom that every human function exists to serve a purpose. Since not even the most prejudiced would refuse to concede that the artist has a function, one could safely go on (it was held) to ask what it is for. The reply was that art enables man to make things in a reasonable manner. It was, therefore, of as much concern to the person who turned out wooden shoes as to a sculptor or a musician.

This may sound prosaic to someone who has just been reading Shelley, but it is really a magnificent compliment. The medieval reasoner - following Aristotle in a measure - made the art-function the peer of the speculative and moral functions of the mind. It was described as the third "intellectual power," and its right use was a virtue. Curiously enough, however, good intentions were held to be of little use to the artist. He was judged by the thing he produced, which stood apart from him as infallible and implacable evidence. Some men can; others remain amateurs. A good cook may be depended upon for an excellent salad, but just how she does it is a mystery to those who cannot get on without a book of recipes. A master-mason will not fail to produce a more compelling image than you had hoped for, but no amount of eager imitation can save a clumsy apprentice from ruining a block of marble.

The medieval emphasis lay, therefore, upon "how" a thing was done. The magic of a manner was seen as common to the merest artisan and to the gifted man who gave form to ineffable beauty. To a considerable extent, this point of view was derived from circumstance as well as logic. Nobody in that time looked for what we should term "original creations." Shoemakers, weavers and

seamstresses furnished what the public wanted, and here in turn the influence of patterns was very strong. A grand dame yearned for a dress "like" someone else's; and both because precise imitation was out of the question for mechanical reasons and because the worker was genuinely an individual, the article was generally quaintly distinctive but always fashioned to serve its purpose. Similarly the "fine arts" were either so firmly controlled by the patrons (church and state) or so strongly influenced by lodge or craft traditions that the artisan usually did little more than carry out instructions. He was expected to know "how," but the question of "what," so very important to the modern painter or poet, was not a matter over which he lost much sleep.

In order to understand this point of view - and insight into it is necessary by reason of the problem we are soon to state - one must bear in mind the mentality of the Middle Ages and remind oneself that any socialized mind is the product of education. Medieval civilization was the achievement of the monastic schools. These were inclined to define all truth as a "deposit," as an accumulation of evidence objective in character and value. One reason why this happened was that mankind had been given Revelation to preserve and absorb, altogether independently of "discovery" or "invention." Their deep respect for the "deposit" of the faith naturally led medieval men to set a high value also upon the learning salvaged from the past. When Saint Thomas expounded Aristotelian philosophy, he and his brethren were looked upon by many as dangerous innovators; and before he could prevail, he had to prove the eminent authoritativeness of the Stagirite.

Broadly speaking, the medieval arts were governed by this principle, which operated naturally and without arousing a sense of intolerable constraint. Church synods defined with considerable strictness the subject matter of ecclesiastical art. In his excellent books on the iconography of the Middle Ages in France, fimile Male has shown how widely this guidance was accepted and to what a marvelous extent the plastic arts followed texts of theology, hagiography, official history and encyclopedic learning. Similarly the schools taught rhetoric and poetry as "practical subjects" wherein the pupil achieved proficiency by doing a standard exercise over and over again. Even the method of reasoning - perhaps the

core of the scholastic educational system - was really a formula one used until it produced results. Few men, looking at the magnificent evidence offered by the cathedrals of Chartres and Notre Dame, the poetry of Dante and the philosophy of Aquinas, will be foolhardy enough to doubt that the method was fruitful. It was, however, a social method and therefore dependent upon the stability of society.

In all likelihood the very fact that the medieval time was able to develop individuals of such stature as the varied masters of the thirteenth century attained indicated that the end of the period was at hand. Little by little the individual separated himself from the social plan. Heretics were no longer dominated; they won their independence. Rulers stood out against the unity of the empire, and all too rarely "went to Canossa." Inside the corporate communion of the faithful, Roger Bacon and Occam sponsored a critical position in philosophy; Savonarola was conscious of individualistic religious missions; and in the arts a Gothic naturalism, more and more evident in the cathedrals, paved the way for the Renaissance. For better or for worse, a new order of things had been established, which profoundly modified the prevailing conception of the arts.

When we behold the full-fledged Renaissance artist - Michelangelo or Leonardo - the change from the medieval craftsman is too abrupt to be explicable. But the historian of culture - note for example the Austrian Max Dvorak - is able to trace a gradual development out of one into the other, through a series of minute gradations. It may serve our purpose to compare two representative religious poems, the one of which - Saint Thomas Aquinas' *Adoro Te devote* - is a thirteenth-century lyric, and the other of which - *Dies Irae* (the authorship of which is uncertain) - was written, roughly speaking, a hundred years later. Saint Thomas' hymn to the Eucharist is justly considered an admirable lyric, combining beautiful diction with that rarer something which, for the lack of a more explicit term, we call "the poetic." Quite obviously, however, the Angelic Doctor was merely riming theological doctrine. His verse tells us everything that is essential in our knowledge of the Eucharist, and nowhere adduces a personal view or experience. It is the catechism made metrical. *Dies Irae*, on the other hand, is a sharply etched personal vision. It summons up the day of universal doom and the imperturbable shade of death, in order to voice the humility, dread

and repentance of a single soul. That is one reason why it seems to us so very great a poem.

Roughly speaking, the difference between these two hymns is the difference between modern and medieval art. As theorists we may prefer the second, but in practice we have no choice. The poet of to-day must be "original" - that is, his work is necessarily born of personal experience and can attain to universality only in so far as the experience is shared by all mankind. Mr. Eric Gill, the English sculptor and designer, has recently declared that the modern demand imposes an impossible burden upon the craftsman. In literature, however, this demand is postulated so generally as to have become axiomatic. Thereby a peculiar need for a certain kind of freedom is created, which may be considered the crucial point in the relationship between literary handiwork and the Catholic Church. It is a relatively puzzling matter, but is by no means the riddle which disturbed minds not infrequently talk about.

Let us begin to examine it by remembering that all art is a making of images. This is neither a wholly useful nor an exclusively ornamental business. It is, rather, a way of satisfying an instinct as deeply rooted in human nature as are the urges to eat or mother children.5 We are so fashioned that we cannot understand - or even, perhaps, bear - the life we are surrounded by until we have made a picture of it. Through a kind of pantomimic creation we refashion the world the Lord hath made to conform with the perspective of our own lonely souls. The child is busy making a constant succession of life-pictures. Boys live through a dozen martial careers before they settle down to bookkeeping; girls bring up varied families of dolls. Though it has been said a dozen times (and never better than by Francis Thompson) that the poet is a perennial child, the point needs to be stressed constantly. The artist really does accomplish in a grown-up fashion what the merriest youngster achieves in play. He does not escape from actuality (nor does the little girl in her toy nursery!) into some variety of ethereal universe, but he transposes actuality into a frame which sets off its significance.

Aristotle described this function as the tragic artist exercises it with the term "catharsis." While gazing at the tragic image of human

destiny, the passions, prejudices and ignorances of the spectators are corrected. These are severally, as it were, snapshots of the universe - emotional or intellectual - in which the lower animal shadows have interfered with the clear focus of reason. Each spectator (if the figure may be continued) recognizes some of his films in the great tragic art portrait, but at the same time he is aware of how much more distinct, large, fine and true this is. In all literature the desire for an "ennobling corrective" is the ultimate standard of excellence. Matthew Arnold, perhaps a little more rationalistic than a philosophy of reason demands, called it the desire "for the best that has been known and thought in the world." It would be better to say "the best that has been experienced in the world," provided one bore in mind that no experience is, strictly speaking, possible apart from reason. (I do not, of course, wish to imply that art objects never serve a useful purpose. The more directly and simply we can employ them, the more immediate is their bearing upon our lives. But if the "fine arts" were not something more than merely utilitarian we should hardly call them "fine.")

At any rate, the modern literary person is a maker of images. But he differs from his Greek and medieval ancestors in two important respects: first, he restricts the term "objective" to a far smaller area; secondly, he is far more scientifically minded. To a man living in the thirteenth century, the existence of sanctifying grace was, in all likelihood, a more obvious fact than the existence of the Alps. At least his descriptions of the second were frequently erroneous, while his impression of the first was strikingly definite. In our time an individual author may have all the faith of a medieval doctor, but he must always reckon with the circumstance that a part of his audience is utterly incredulous. Therefore he will tend, whether he will or no, to represent faith as "my" faith; and of course non-theological truths are similarly personalized. The objective - or the only universe that can be dealt with apart from the individual himself - has now been limited to bodies and their known reactions, to fishwives and their sorrows, to debutantes and their flirtations. Our new tyrant is a subjective *sensus communis*. All this involves a great and perilous sacrifice, from which we pray to be delivered.

On the other hand, the one outstanding contribution of science to

the intellectual life of man has now seeped into consciousness so far that it is wholly indispensable. This is the habit of hypothesis. We correlate the facts of life as these are revealed to us with an explanation. Our images have all become something like a novelist's plots. We want to see the beginning, the end and the reason why. Whereas the sublime spectacle of *OEdipus Rex* was a self-explanatory vision of the whole of human life, the outlines of *Madame Bovary* constitute the diagnosis of a trained pathologist. A fiction writer must always explain "why" his characters act unbecomingly, even though it necessitate tedious excursions into Freud or phrenology. And so there is really no vast difference in modern practice between the imagination of the scientist who peers into the marvelous conduct of atoms and the imagination of a story-teller who scrutinizes the behavior of Kathleen.

Briefly speaking, therefore, we may summarize the modern artist's demand for freedom under three heads: in the first place, the faculty of image-making must be as unhampered as the fancy of a child astraddle a dream giraffe, if the creative act is to be authentic and not derivative; secondly, there must be enough room for both the spiritual convictions of the artist and for the absence of these convictions from the world he addresses; third, there must be a place for the construction of appropriate hypotheses. All this may become easier to visualize if we suppose a Catholic critic who undertakes to interpret Ibsen. Such a critic must be free to grasp and relive the Ibsen images precisely as they are, and not as he would like to have them be or as his personal convictions might tend to make them; he needs to discern the character, mentality, purpose and environment of Ibsen without sacrificing his own point of view; and he cannot avoid trying to reach those explanations and verdicts which best correlate and interpret the facts in the case.

I believe I have stated the matter* fairly enough. Is there, then, anything about the profession of the Catholic faith which would render the critical work described impossible? The easiest way to answer would be to say that there have been precisely such Catholic critics of Ibsen, with whose work the world at large has been more than satisfied. One could then go on to adduce more and more instances and names to show that the question raised is wholly chimerical. After all, Mr. Chesterton has done relatively well by

Dickens, and the Baron von Hiigel wrote wisely enough of George Fox. Of course individual Catholics have been known to display all kinds of narrowness and short-sighted zeal, differing not a whit in these frailties from their modernist or agnostic fellow men. But it may be preferable to discard all such matters of personality and reflect for a moment on the principles involved.

In the first place, there cannot be, from a Catholic point of view, any need for blindness as to "how" a thing has been made. Approval of artistic excellence is only recognition of a good; and, apart from all other considerations, failure to admit the existence of the good would be regarded by theologians of almost every description as being either ignorance or prejudice, both far from commendable. As to the "what" of the thing made (let us say the theme of a drama), more complex considerations are in order. The problem is not at all the same when the artist under scrutiny is a Catholic as it is when he happens not to be a Catholic. Let us take each in its turn. Undoubtedly there are some materials, attitudes and explanations to which a Catholic could not consistently turn. He is never, for instance, a person for whom good and evil lives are purely objective things. To him both are moral conditions, dependent partly upon environment and inheritance, partly upon free will, and partly upon Divine grace. He cannot, in a word, gaze upon sin without some of the sorrow which once made so infinitely pathetic the wounded face of Christ. But that he should turn his eyes from the world's sores and see nothing in the universe but middle-class primness - in order to avoid shocking some imaginary schoolgirl - is an assumption too ridiculous to merit attention. Precisely because he is a maker of images, governed in the final analysis by the eternal laws of sincerity and honesty, he must mold the clay of life as it is; and in so doing he will, from afar and in quite a different manner, be copying the custom of Holy Church, forever trailing the lost sheep.

Similarly, the Catholic artist cannot permit himself certain varieties of compromise with his audience. If this happens to be fond of stories into which erotic excitement has been infused, much as arsenic might be stirred into coffee, he cannot consistently set himself to supplying the demand. Or, to take another case, it is impossible (I believe) that a Catholic critic should ever completely

disguise his faith. This he will not parade or introduce into places where it does not feel at home; but precisely because he must have been spiritually "reborn" before he accepted the word of Christ, there is no possibility of his somersaulting from the old Adam to the new according as the wind blows. In other words, the differences which separate the modern Catholic from the world around him are real barriers, frequently difficult to cross; but it is absolutely necessary to traverse them, being conscious first of all that one shares life and nature with all one's fellow men and therefore has much in common with them, and realizing, in the second place, that charity has all the force of primordial energy - that it can indeed move mountains, but that it is also merely a synonym for generosity.

Finally, what "explanations" can the Catholic artist advance? It may be admitted that a certain timidity in the face of "new ideas," either of psychology or physics, is characteristic of Catholic groups here and there. Traditionalism is an historical legacy which sometimes exacts a heavy income tax. Saint Thomas has been restored to the position of mentor for only some thirty years, and not everybody has been imbued as yet with his boundless scientific confidence. It is a sign of the times that only now, after long years of apologies, are we beginning to understand that his interest in astrology was the postulate not of a naive credulity, but rather of a passionate eagerness to search everywhere for information. And most surely, after we have come to understand his point of view more fully, it will be abundantly plain that no Catholic of the modern time is debarred from seeking in psychoanalysis, sociology or kindred sciences every useful scrap of information. Nobody has utilized knowledge about the "deterministic" aspects of human nature better than has Paul Bourget. There have been few more brilliant workers in the subconscious than the German convert, Hugo Ball.

From the point of view of the non-Catholic artist (as he presents himself to a Catholic spectator) conditions are not at all the same. As a general rule, one may say with Justin the Martyr that no sincere thinking about the universe by a mind sufficiently endowed to think sincerely is without value, and then go on to suggest by way of a parallel instance that any writing which merits being defined as literature must be good in some manner. It is quite

possible to deal with this good as an objective thing deserving of recognition, but it is equally necessary to deal with what may be wrong or evil in the same wise. Objectively! Not to belabor it with accusations of evil intent or voluntary ignorance, proof of which is difficult to furnish even under the most favorable circumstances! We may assert quite definitely that the Catholic critic who would refuse to admit the virtues of Thomas Hardy or Henri Beyle, because he could not agree with the metaphysics which these men postulate, would be a sorry sight, a man betraying a tradition. No less reprehensible, however, is the critic who belies his own convictions and poses as a bland professor of indifferentism, to whom all phases of metaphysic are acceptable. Nor ought anyone to overlook the fact that a Catholic critic worthy of the title will be trained for his job, and familiar with the elemental notions of literature and history. We are even reminded by the Abbe Calvet that some understanding of theology is not amiss in one frequently called upon to venture declarations about matters of dogmatic or moral significance.

By way of a summary, then, we need simply say that in so highly individualized a departure as modern literary art and criticism, the Catholic also is an individual. There are some things he cannot do without changing his status; but there are also things nobody else can do without changing his status. Anatole France would have been obliged to turn inside out in order to write a reverent and historically accurate portrait of Saint Joan. Herr Emil Ludwig will probably never juggle himself into a state of mind capable of approaching the life of Christ with something more suitable than rationalistic prepossessions. And it means attacking the Catholic's capacity for sincerity to imagine that he can pose, for the entertainment of the public, as a delicate disciple of Mr. Wells. Beyond any doubt, however, his individuality is abetted by his religious convictions, for reasons inherent in those very convictions themselves.

The Catholic personality is qualified by nothing so much as the concept of freedom. This has never been set forth better than in Dr. Romano Guardini's university lectures, *Vom Sinn der Kirche*; and perhaps we can profit from following him a little way. What does it mean to be free? "Every one of us," says Guardini, "bears a primal

image of his being within himself - the Divine idea, in which the Creator thought that being. This includes not merely the universal image of human being, but also all of what constitutes a given individual personality. Each person exists only once. The being-human can be encountered in this particular form only once." It follows that in order to be free a man "must emphasize this personal individuality in all his being and acting - must live true to himself, and therefore to the Divine idea of that self, not as a result of artificial constraint but naturally." Yet this is not all. The proper relation to other things must be found, and that can only be a relation of realistic understanding. One who is circumscribed by doubt, prejudice and passion is not blest with the liberty to see the world that is, either in part or as a round whole. Here also a lucid vision of the individual is a necessary prelude to comprehension of the hierarchical organization of the spheres. But how shall this be attained? It is either beyond our reach, says Guardini, or it must be acquired with the help of the Church, which alone on earth spans eternity as well as time, the individual as well as the society of the spirit, the single soul as well as God Himself. Isolation is not liberty but imprisonment. The Church which gives one to all, likewise gives all to one. It embeds the soul in a garden so that it may live.10

Round the proper application of the Catholic ideal of freedom more than a little discussion of literary problems has arisen. Many recent theorists, notably the French novelist Emile Baumann, have advocated what they term an "integral literature." That is to say, a literature written by men so thoroughly enlivened by their faith that it governs every aspect of their interpretation of life. Unfortunately that seems too much to expect, for two reasons: first, one thus wholly captured by religious insight would be a mystic, in exceptional cases a saint, but not in the usual sense an artist; secondly, that aspect of artistic activity which is the result of trying to supply a demand that exists in others renders indispensable a certain earthiness, playfulness, positiveness far too normally incompatible with the wholly mystical or saintly life. When the gift of plastic expression is joined with the "integrally Catholic" personality, the result is a Saint Teresa rather than a Cervantes. And though there can be no question of the priority of sanctity over genius, one cannot very easily believe that one is often the source of the other.

Indeed one explanation of the comparative dearth of notable Catholic literature is probably the habit we have acquired of looking upon writing as an instrument of religion. It has been estimated that the total Catholic reading public in the United States - that is, the public which buys books by Catholic authors even irregularly - does not exceed thirty thousand. Nothing is more likely than that people who have purchased several of the works commonly recommended are convinced that all Catholic publications are of the same character - that all advocate holiness, expound doctrine or set out to edify. And the simple fact is that while mankind needs such volumes and reads some of them with remarkable fidelity, it commonly turns to literature for something entirely different. It seeks the "image of life" for the sake of esthetic satisfaction, for entertainment, for the purgation of its soul. And unless the demand is met, the customer turns elsewhere and is guided by attractive advertising.

We have now arrived at the familiar problem as to whether literary art can properly serve an apologetic purpose. Can it establish with any marked success a persuasive argument for belief, or make a moral point notably well? I hasten to remark that there is no reason in principle why it cannot do these things. It is impossible to believe that *The Hound of Heaven* is not a great poem, even though it does voice a distinct plea for a definite point of view. A great deal depends upon the ability of the poet or the novelist. But one does feel that for the present anything like a frankly didactic art is effort frustrated in advance. Mr. Joel Spingarn's separation of art from morals has been followed by so much similar reasoning that it is well-nigh futile to recommend another point of view. For most of us, the artist is a specialist who must furnish what he is expected to produce. Nor is there any clear reason why we should advise a novelist to inject into his work a "good lesson," something excellent in itself but extraneous, any more than we demand that a baker shall bake a penny catechism into his loaf of bread.

For, after all, the art purpose is not the moralist's purpose. The old saying that the one envisages truth while the other has to do with beauty does not clear up much, but it leads to the making of a relatively satisfactory distinction. One reads the moralists (and who could be more worth reading than Montaigne or Pascal?) in order to

acquire the knack of molding one's life. But one turns to the poets and romancers - that is, if one is honest - in the hope of escaping from all tasks into the leisure of contemplation. We want the company of the "best that has been known and thought in the world" because we are sick of the rest of the world. And when we are actually introduced to these best things, during silent hours and through the medium of the music of speech, it is inconceivable that we should not return, ultimately, to our moral tasks with a greater courage and a deepened understanding. We look upon thei lighted face of the inner universe for a spell; and though we have gazed into a glass darkly, there has been enough of radiance to uplift our hearts.

To what extent is the Catholic able to contribute something particularly valuable to these contemplative hours? One might reply that the mere thought of carrying on in the spirit of Dante and Cervantes, of Racine and Chaucer, is sufficient indication of opportunity. But the nearness of our time to certain definite literary problems is very likely a better way of approach. In the first place, the Catholic is now almost alone in clinging to a "cosmic" interpretation of life, which is indispensable to heroic enterprise in letters. For in a very obvious sense no form of monism will do. The assumption to which any out-and-out evolutionist is necessarily driven is that there is no difference between human careers and ether eddies. Seen in terms of a mechanistic universe, these careers become nothing more startling than phases of a cosmic accident and are therefore made ridiculous by attempts at glorification. They invite of the spectator nothing more fervent than irony, nothing more abysmal than dismay or resignation. Viewed as the monist regards them, human activities do not justify the dignity of Vergil's solemn and prophetic song, or the rapt voyages into eternity which Dante's cantos record.

Catholic poets alone, therefore, have maintained in our time the office of the seer. In English letters no verse since Browning possesses the quality of metaphysical bravery excepting the best pages of Francis Thompson, Coventry Patmore, Alice Meynell and the other Catholic poets. Elsewhere lyricism has been transmuted into the disillusionment of the Sitwells or the stoical renouncements of Rupert Brooke. Only one living poet read by persons not of his

own nation outlines the hierarchical character of the human race as that was understood by Plato, TEschylus, Sophocles and the other masters of antique inspiration. That one is Paul Claudel. In his writing one finds, as something fully realized and not merely imported into literature for esthetic reasons, the spiritual dynamism without which even the rhythm of language must wither into the dance of eternal death. And - I speak now only of artistic values, not of pragmatic tests - it seems evident that if poetry is to conserve the spiritual vision which, during ages past, formed the better half of its grandeur, it will to a large extent be so because the Catholic is uplifted into clairvoyance by his habit of linking reason and belief in the knowledge of God.

Then there are lesser, perhaps more generally understandable tasks. For all practical purposes, the novel has been from time immemorial a love story. We seldom pause to consider, however, to what a great extent this fact is bound up with Christian culture. The thousand and one familiar rules of honor and custom, the ideals of chastity and loyalty, the acceptance of the cross of sacrifice and the renouncement of desire in order that another may live - these matters are at one and the same time the stock-in-trade of romantic fiction and the moral achievements of age-old Christian life. Think of Jeanie Deans or Cymbeline, of Hester Prynne or Pompilia, and you think of situations which paganism, either modern or ancient, is incapable of evolving. The conflicts which enshrine these lives are moral conflicts, important only because they are also spiritual struggles. And Francois Mauriac, perhaps the most brilliant of the younger French novelists, tells us frankly: "This sort of romantic conflict has now become unintelligible. . . . How can an era to which all that concerns the flesh has become unimportant be favorable to the writing of romance?" 18 Yes, unless there be retained some of the Christian insight into the sovereign significance of life, even the most commonplace of plots must lose their savor. Faileth dream the dreamer, and lute the lutanist! Have we ever paused to estimate the distance between *Manon Lescaut* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*? The first was, fundamentally, a result of hallowed willingness to see in the love between man and woman an image, however distant and indistinct, of the resolution of all duality into unity; the second professes the same boundless anarchy that prevails among the atoms.

It may be that, in the face of the contemporary onslaught, the Catholic writer will find it increasingly difficult to treat of life as if it were still characterized by the traditional moral qualities. To this point we shall return in a moment. What is the really magnificent opportunity for this writer in our time can be understood best if we return to our notion of the literary image. He can, first of all, assume the risk of an uncompromising, terrible honesty. He can paint the countenance of this generation as it is - with the sores which disfigure it bodily and spiritually; with its hunger for passionate expression and its incessant satiety; with its widespread senile irony - the last shrill note on a violin from which all strings but one have been torn. And so, with genuinely Augustinian charity, he may voice a tremendous new *De Profundis*, more fierce and elemental than Thompson's *Hound of Heaven*, ending with the staggering choruses of a universal outcry for the grace of God.

This task several more intrepid representatives have already attempted. But there is, it seems to me, a second and possibly more attractive possibility. If I understand them correctly, the newer German Catholics (in particular their most eminent theorist, Karl Muth) have this in mind when they speak of a new "Christian classicism." We need not be too strongly affected (as Mauriac, the follower of Pascal, undoubtedly is) by the somber drama of the non-religious man. We may, rather, bear in mind two of the most pertinent mandates which the Savior addressed to His disciples: first, that they should live in a society, and second that they should possess absolute confidence. Our normal way of realizing this communal existence and of attaining to this confidence is the liturgical life, wherein isolation is sacrificed more and more completely to a unity in glory and joy, and out of which we carry, even to the bridal bed and the workshop, the benedictions and the wreaths of grace which lend to the commonest endeavors an enduring significance. Faith can move mountains: "He that believeth in me shall live forever!"

If, on the one hand, Catholic art needs the pessimism which the spectacle of a world inconsecrate engenders, we need even more the din of a grateful optimism. It is ordained that we shall festoon the altars of Heaven with every good that is - even, after the fashion of Dostoievski, with the good that dwells in the hearts of the

reprobate. Who cannot dream of a Catholic literature hale and robust as the magnificent serenity of Thomas Aquinas himself, sharing the faith which the Church announces in every phrase of her official tongue, and sounding like a new glad gospel? Of course this optimism will be anything else but bland. It will have overheard the wheels of time, and have looked even more closely than Jeremy Taylor at the bones of kings in the Escorial. But of these things it is neither ashamed nor afraid. It has learned too well the lesson of its own miraculous irony, which is the secret of the triumph of love over death.

No doubt all these possibilities are difficult to realize. One reason why this is so is, perhaps, the intellectualist habit of so much of modern Catholicism. Owing to a chain of circumstances, large numbers of the faithful have grown prone to consider their creed a matter than can be memorized, recited and performed. It has even degenerated, for not a few, into a number of "points" which need only to be arrayed in a mathematical pattern. How different all this is from the vision of the Church which the liturgy expresses, wherein all the emphasis is upon living! And it seems to me by no means strange that, whereas the aspects of modern Catholic literature which have tended to rob it of influence and render it wooden are derived from intellectualist premises or based upon intellectualist purposes - note for instance the avalanche of "apologetic" literature in the form of tales or treatises, which is as dead as so many feet of lumber when it is carted from the press - those other aspects which breathe an undimming vitality and exert a ceaseless influence are based upon liturgical habits or models. Our English Catholic poetry, it is immediately evident, is linked arm in arm with liturgical song. Mr. Chesterton's detective stories are so appealing because they keep the flavor of mysteries. And one might easily uphold the view that the virility of *The Path to Rome*, the best of many good Belloc books, springs from the circumstance that it is about people who have kept on going to Mass.

Nor does this contravene what has been said earlier in this chapter, and imply that literature is to be, for the Catholic, pious script on sacred themes. Some of this there will always be, naturally and desirably. But the historical expression of the liturgical spirit, as preserved in the varied sacred arts, clearly shows that all life was

envisaged - even to the market-place in front of the cathedral. For our Christian fathers did not think of their churches as things apart from life, but as signs in the midst of life. History has evidence that the same master-mason who carved the heads of seraphs and the modest forms of saints ventured also to chisel out the figures of reapers and hunters, of sinners and fantastic monsters. And I recall that the most austere monks I ever knew, whose lives were spent in strict conformity with ancient rule, used now and then to bless days with cheerful frivolity, in which the neighborhood joined with talk of crops and weddings and at which there was as much good wine as a man's head could carry.

To set the Christian faith squarely once again in the very midst of mankind may profitably be the ambition of this new literature of which we dream. It need not ever be, this gracious writing for which one hopes, either the product of esthetic snobbery or the diary of morbid isolation. More than thirty years ago the Church recommended to all its children a philosophy which professed a deep passion for reality - which, indeed, maintained that knowledge of God was inextricably bound up with knowledge of reality. And there is more than a little reason for believing that the effect of this wise declaration is already manifest, not so much in a new respect for speculative intelligence (though that also is manifest in places) as in a new love for the things that are and a new understanding of man as a concrete object. I see no reason why many of us would now be shocked - as our ancestors of an astringent era would have been shocked - by the robustness of Rubens or the quiet smile of Chaucer. We have at least got to the place where we know that we do not want a literature preserved in alcohol or whittled out of wood. We are almost sure once again that man really and truly wriggles.

That all this involves difficulties goes without saying. One may be sure, however, that to the Church all the demands of creative exuberance are legitimate, provided only that they are genuine. The freedom of man being one of the great Christian postulates, though of course it is contingent upon law and circumstance, art necessarily faces the problems to be outlined in the next chapter. But we must not think first of the limitations but of the force. The farmer deals with his crop, the sowing and the reaping, and then turns to the

weather, the boll weevil and the marketing of surpluses. Fishermen go out after fish, and then proceed to the salting. And from time immemorial farmers and fishermen have been the illustrious symbols of spiritual activity.

The Moral Ideal

Fear lest the literary art prove a source of moral decay is as old as civilized mankind. The strictures of Socrates and Plato are familiar to every student of the classics, and Roman censors were sometimes very outspoken. Naturally enough this anxiety increased after the advent of Christianity. There are sharp sermons to the writer in dozens of encyclicals and homilies. In some ages the warnings have been more pronounced than in others, but a sharp lookout has constantly been maintained. Though official pronouncements on the matter are fewer than is sometimes believed, one is justified in thinking that the Church has wrestled with literature at least as frequently as with any other human activity. But a distinction is at once in order.

Most of the protest has arisen less out of Catholic dread that a book might incite readers to perverse deeds than out of Catholic reverence for Revealed Truth. All men approach the verities of faith through a lane of personal experience; and there is danger that the dust, shadows and winds encountered on the way may distort the vision. That is why heretics have normally been very earnest folk. Luther's starting-point, for example, was not at all the moral question of indulgence selling. It was a psychological problem - how to live according to a theory of grace arrived at during the course of his own spiritual development. Because he clung firmly to this starting-point, he ended by arriving at a set of convictions completely at variance with those sponsored by Catholic tradition. The Church, therefore, is always on the alert to correct individualistic notions of tenets of faith, especially when these haunt the minds of such as are in a position to exercise leadership.

So far the Catholic position is reasonably clear and understandable. Since the teaching authority vested in the See of Peter is defined as empowered to preserve and foster the objective doctrines of Revelation, any teaching which can be analyzed as purely subjective must be repudiated by it. When we come to the question of determining whether or not a book can incite to passion or moral degradation, matters become exceedingly complex. The sage declared long ago that what is one man's meat may prove to be

another's poison. Here the subjective factor is paramount, for the reason that all the forces making for decision - free will, temperament, training, experience - differ with individuals. History therefore presents us with many seeming contradictories. During the medieval time people were edified by legends which would shock not a few modern souls, even as they shocked contemporary theologians. Renaissance Italy proudly adorned churches with images which were destined to make Newman blush. Henri Gheon, the French convert playwright and poet, records the conviction that some young men of his generation were "emancipated" from religion by an excess of pietistic lore. Some people have been corrupted by obscene jokes; others have been ruined by sermons. In short, anyone who devotes five minutes of his time to history will see that propriety meant one thing to the average subject of Queen Victoria and another thing entirely to the Prophets of Israel.

Not that moral standards shift or change. We are far from conceding that there is anything like relativity of right and wrong. The literature under discussion may reek with lascivious suggestion and yet distinguish carefully between good and evil, or virtue and immorality. Your cheap movie moralizes throughout ever so many titles, and yet the boy who looks at it is driven to imitate the prowess of Jesse James. Not long ago newspaper men were smiling at a book which, though written to expose and denounce the sins of various French novelists, managed to become the most objectionable volume of the year. When one has considered all these things from every angle and tried to reckon with the difficult problems they involve, one concludes that few hard and fast rules can be drawn. Common sense is the only satisfactory judge, and even it cannot generalize for individual consciences. Doubtless some people ought to abstain from art altogether, as others should keep away from wine or politics. It is characteristic of the Church not to rely upon blanket decisions to regulate the matter, but to dispense private spiritual counsel to those who ask for it. Unfortunately there are all sorts of self-appointed advisers. Almost any excited stickler can, in our time, get a hearing because his or her moral susceptibilities have been ruffled in some manner by a book. Normally one may diagnose these complaints rather simply and effectively by asking oneself if the accuser has given signs of lucid understanding on other subjects or occasions. When the uproar is

amateurish, it is usually also pathological. But the public ear is constantly cocked for scandal, and so Catholic literateurs in particular are always being hounded by sensitive scenters of vice. Some day the religious press will catch up with the vast majority of the clergy and realize that it is silly to provide a frame for such rant. The resulting improvement would be notable.

But though this whole problem needs to be dealt with prudently, it cannot be tossed aside with a laugh. Time and place create conditions which establish a kind of social personality, from the moral point of view. This Zeitgeist can be divined by men of experience, vision and right standards. They cannot hope to be perfectly accurate, but their opinions do coalesce into a fairly realistic impression of what is the especial danger of the age. And so they exercise the helpful and legitimate function of safeguarding the public against moral corruption, just as boards of health ward off contagious disease. All who live in the bonds of civic union must be awake to all things that serve the common need. Censorship, therefore, ought to be a kind of mentorship. It should offer guidance to the time spirit lest the unwary succumb to the suggestion which happens to correspond to the prevailing spiritual weakness. That rank obscenity should be discountenanced by any society aspiring to the status of a healthy civilization is a platitude. But there are epochs when the lines must be drawn far more tightly, and when laxity only means cutting a sluice in the dam which checks the onrush of passion and surrender.

To what extent the state ought to exercise control over letters and the arts is not easy to determine. Practice would seem to indicate that it is seldom prudent to demand more than the few sanitary measures, which can be put into effect noiselessly and almost automatically, normally prescribed by modern governments. Sometimes, of course, a community will be faced with a problem out of the ordinary. Those who have witnessed troops of young girls flocking to giggle at raw plays in a theater, the approach to which is lined by leering men and women of the baser sort, will understand, if they have their wits about them, that a policeman or two are not out of place on such occasions. But though these cases can be dealt with individually, it seems impossible to base any general rule upon them. People simply do not expect a great deal of moral vigilance

from their governments. Almost every period of state censorship has been followed by a violent reaction, the excesses committed during which more than offset the previous gain to morals. Nor did even the English Puritan Parliament succeed in stamping out the disease of play-acting. Bootleg theatricals earned many a shilling; and (like every other type of surreptitious product) those shillings were usually tainted.

In our time few Catholic moralists pin much faith to state supervision. They hope rather to contend against evil tendencies with counsel and education, gradually promoting abhorrence of vice that assumes the dress of art. Sometimes ecclesiastical authority specifically condemns a book or play as perverse, or calculated to endanger the soul. More frequently it is criticism, exercised in the pulpit or through the press, which warns of the evil effects likely to be attendant upon certain reading habits. This effort is exceedingly difficult, is often received with a series of sneers, and is bound to be subjective in a measure. Nevertheless thousands of souls do heed the advice, and as a result some are saved from degradation. An individual artist can easily make a plausible defense of a production which exerts a baneful influence upon others. But he is fooling himself badly if he believes that his personal right to express a desire or to portray a vision absolves him from the duty of respecting the temper of his audience. One need only bid him notice the inestimable damage done to the good name of France by a literature of smudgy amours, or ask him to read *Madame Bovary* carefully.

It is, of course, obvious that merely erecting walls around people will not save them from contamination. Everybody needs to be taught how to win and use freedom. For this reason Catholic tradition, never satisfied with negative counsels, has upheld a lofty ideal of art, which may not always permit of realization any more than the monastic virtues can be inculcated into all men, but which does help to keep the human eye and heart on a level with normalcy. When Saint Augustine, trained to appreciate the pleasure which comes with gazing upon artistic loveliness, wrote out the fullness of his understanding of Christian living, he did not fail to take the beautiful into account. And as he looked about for a satisfactory explanation, he read appreciatively those vast reflective

hymns which Plotinus had sung to everlasting Radiance. With him the early Church, therefore, considered the beautiful the aftermath of a suggestion, conveyed by earthly things or shadows, of an idea which antedates nature and exists eternally, unchangeably, in the Divine mind. Art is a premonition of, an insight into, the ineffable Splendor of which terrestrial prettinesses are only dim reflections; and it possesses the power to take our gaze away from meanness toward the lustrous immortal deeps.

This conception of art is the motive behind the great patronage which the Church has patiently bestowed upon the crafts and letters. Painters and poets were held to be endowed with a gift for presenting reality of a sort which intelligence as such could not reveal. Their "ideas" were not concepts or static truths, but rather "visions" incorporating what was termed splendor veritatis - the splendor of truth - as differentiated from the mere existence of truth. In other words, they were considered contemplatives of a definite kind. Just as a man may know precisely how the celestial machinery produces a sunset without being able to see appreciatively the intoxicating wealth of an evening sky, so humanity may learn the truths of faith without being awed by their majesty or unutterable harmoniousness. To the artist, therefore, has been reserved the function of teaching them this primal aspect of the Divine, however feeble and remote his images may be. Whenever people look to art for this service, so illustrious and dignified, they can hardly think of it in terms of mere animalistic portraiture or lewd sportiveness.

One may well believe that this Augustinian conception established, for a succession of deeply Christian souls, a sort of affinity between the mystic and the artist. And in our time, when so many Augustinian reflections are being honored once again, the point has been reiterated with modifications compatible with the modern outlook. Psychology, to begin with, has come to differentiate between the states of mind which tend upward or downward - toward ecstasy or toward lethargy - from the condition of normal comprehension. It tells us that there are states of creative activity which mystic and artist seem to share, though not for precisely the same purpose. The first has riveted his gaze upon the Divine basis of reality; the second is concerned with the inner side of reality

itself. When the two are blended in one man, humanity achieves all that contemplativeness can give - a rare occurrence, but one which posits a kind of goal to Catholic art.

More recently the Abbé Henri Bremond, approaching the matter from a somewhat different angle, gave modern criticism a theory with which it has since been industriously concerned. I have no intention of outlining the conception of "pure poetry" or to "poetry and prayer" as these are defined in his well-known books. Suffice it to say that he believes even the fragments of a genuine poet's work suffused with a spiritual vitality which, though immediately perceptible, does not depend upon the facts, the ideas or even the images incorporated in the text. This "something" is, therefore, "pure" poetry as distinguished from the other subsidiary elements which may be termed "impure." Nor does it come into being without a cause. A certain experience is the source of poetry, to be identified in a measure with the experience which is the source of mystical insight. Both are "suprarational" in the sense that they are induced neither by logic nor by cosmic actuality; and yet poetry is only a tentative essay of the spirit's force, which finds its proper sphere and winged flight in true mysticism. Accordingly the origin of poetic art - and, to a lesser degree, of all imaginative literature - is not reality, or objective circumstance, but rather a vision of beauty, a response to something brighter than nature, to which Plato gave the provisional name of "idea."

These several restatements of Augustinian conviction, together with others which are to be found in modern religious poetry, the art of Beuron and other places, suffice to indicate the resoluteness with which the Catholic spirit still defends the nobility of the artistic purpose and seeks to give it a positive direction. Nevertheless Catholicism is peculiar in nothing so much as this: it never focuses all its attention upon one point, or one human faculty. It has therefore continued to respect deeply the rights of reason; and from this point of view theory developed within the shadow of the Church joins hands, relatively at least, with what notable modern advocates of the life of reason have proposed as the normal standards of literature. Nothing in the careful thought of Paul Elmer More and the other protagonists of reaction from unbridled feeling but finds its appealing statement in the vast serenity of Christian

speculation which circles round the axis of Saint Thomas. Here is a memorable respect for reason and the universe of reality with which that reason is concerned. During generations when the doctors, following the lead of Immanuel Kant, transferred the content of thought and knowledge to the inward man, the philosophy of the Church, ignored, despised and even frankly hated, upheld the dignity of the supreme instrument for the attainment of insight into the meaning of life.

A literature or art which preserves authentic vision or wisdom will therefore have, if the traditional Catholic sense is right, something different from a moral purpose, and yet be "ennobling" in the strictest way. The hope, in this case, is not so much to make clear the value of an ethical maxim or to "encourage" virtue, but to lift men above the dead level of dross to an area wherein the spirit is unencumbered. And so we may venture to make the following somewhat paradoxical statement: the Church, negatively engaged in safeguarding its faithful from impulses toward the doing of evil which may be garnered from literature, is positively interested in upholding the separation of morals from literature. According to the great Catholic teachers, the value of a work of art lies simply in the rightness of its aspiration and in its sanity. It is to be an aid to contemplation rather than to action. And though individuals may be unable to appreciate this, or insist upon aspects that are secondary in importance, the central truth of a tradition abides and must be respected.

If we now try to think of these matters in terms of actual practice, some assistance may be derived from the following discussion of drama by Leo Weismantel, greatest of German Catholic playwrights: "A glance at what happened in the centuries past shows clearly that the Church has taken a stand regarding individual theatrical phenomena, but never to the theater as a thing in itself. It has warned the faithful against certain dramatic productions, and even drove out "religious" folk-plays which once had their stage in the very nave of the sacred edifice. On the other hand it has produced the loftiest and most awesome forms of drama; and here one must think not only of Christmas and Passion plays. Biblical drama and Calderon, but also of the daily Divine sacrifice itself, which is the very essence of drama applied to continue the life and death of

Christ throughout the centuries. Thus there is no point in asking how the Church "looks at the theater," for it thinks of all created things in one and the same way. The question is rather: how does the theater, of to-day or yesterday, of here or yonder, look at the Church? Is it imbued with the spirit of Christ, or is it hostile to Him?" And here once again the deciding factor is not whether a play "teaches a lesson" but whether it is beautiful with an inkling of everlasting life.

The Index of Forbidden Books

In spite of the manifest difficulties which censorship involves, the Church has devised and adhered to a system of literary surveillance. Definitely enacted legislation proscribes the use of certain books and outlines a course of action which authors are expected to follow. There can be no question of a "right" to do these things. It would, of course, be absurd to promulgate a theory of ecclesiastical esthetic, or to intrust the teaching of composition to theologians. The legislation to which we refer has a purely moral purpose. Having been Divinely commissioned to save souls, the Church reckons with literature as either an aid or an obstacle. When a book is likely to injure some one of the flock, by dissipating faith or undermining respect for the moral law, ecclesiastical authority is obviously justified in intervening.

The word "Index" is usually taken to mean the list of books which Catholics are forbidden to read, but it really designates a general law applying to the whole domain of printed literature. One may, perhaps, describe it as a series of rules of quarantine applicable to publications which seek to enter the Catholic intellectual territory. If the product cannot pass inspection, it is extradited; if it be smuggled in, its status can never be legalized. Normally the control is in the hands of the Sacred Congregation of the Index (which is comprised of Roman prelates especially appointed for the purpose), but certain rights of supervision belong also to the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office and the Congregation of the Propaganda. It need hardly be added that the Pope himself may forbid the reading of a book. But here, as in all other forms of Catholic activity, a written code outlines the nature of the proceeding.

In so far as modern times are concerned, two decrees are of fundamental importance: the constitution *Officium ac munerum*, promulgated by Pope Leo XIII on January 25, 1897; and the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici gregis*, by Pope Pius X, dated September 8, 1907. In practice the second may be considered simply an endorsement of the first, a careful reading of which will therefore provide the inquirer with all essential information. The primary

object of *Officium ac munerum* was to establish a system of censorship, which is held to be of two kinds. *Censura praevia* (or preliminary censorship) imposes upon authors the duty of submitting a book prior to publication. Censura repressiva (or repressive censorship) provides for official suppression of deleterious literature after it has appeared.

How is the task of preliminary censorship performed? Every bishop appoints a competent theologian to act as a censor. All writing done by Catholics is contingent upon such a censor's approval in varying ways and degrees. Members of religious orders must submit all their writings to him for examination, and in addition secure the written permission of their superiors. Secular priests are expected to ask approval of any book they may write, in token of their submission to authority. The faithful "must submit for previous censorship at least all those books which deal with Holy Scripture, theology, church history, canon law, natural theology or other branches of religion and morals, and, in general, all writings having special reference to religion and morality." When a given book has been approved, it may be published with an "Imprimatur" signed by the bishop, and a "Nihil Obstat" signed by the censor. In the case of works by members of religious orders, an "Imprimere Potest," signed by the superior, is added. The publisher, for his part, is obligated to insert both his own name and that of the author, unless dispensation has been granted.

The chief purpose of preliminary censorship is, therefore, quite clear. Catholic writers, living as they do in obedience to the teaching of the Church, belie themselves when they print something not in harmony with the deposit of the faith. Laymen are, of course, not often considered qualified exponents of doctrine, so that allowance is usually made for their position in the Catholic body and for their relative lack of training in theology. Where priests or religious are concerned, far greater care must be exercised. The views of these are often accepted as authoritative, and their errors may mislead or even deroute many. It should be added, however, that overscrupulousness is not desired. In practice it is not advisable (so experienced censors have told me) to demand approval for books concerned only indirectly with faith or morals, because the bishop is often held accountable for errors and unhappy phrases

which only an omniscient censor could have discerned. Nor does approval guarantee the integrity of a volume. Censors, after all, are human and fallible. They can seldom be sure of even every doctrinal detail in a fat tome of five hundred pages, and manifestly can never verify every date, reference and scientific assertion. Nobody has a more difficult or thankless job than theirs.

The general law of the Index expounds two varieties of repressive censorship. The first is the actual publication of a list of books forbidden to Catholics - the *Index librotum prohibitorum*. This has been printed several times, and to it new names of authors and titles are constantly being added. In a great many instances, the precise reason why a work was condemned may not seem obvious, nor is the act which placed it there considered infallibly right. But since grave reasons were held to exist for believing that it might be injurious to the faithful, the Church exacts obedience under penalty of sin. Normally the process of disapproval is something like this: a book possesses, in the opinion of some trained theologian, dangerous errors or harmful qualities. He sends a letter outlining his objections to the proper authorities, who then appoint an official reader. If he concedes that the book is objectionable, a second reader is asked to review it. If he too disapproves, the Sacred Congregation itself passes upon the work and issues an official report. Sometimes, when circumstances warrant such action, the book is publicly denounced. Sometimes it can be revised, so that minus all objectionable passages it goes its way none the worse for having encountered opposition. In most cases the author of a book to which exception has been taken may regularize his position in the Church by submitting, in writing, to the decision of the Sacred Congregation.

Only a little reflection is needed to show one how many difficulties are involved in the administration of the *Index librorum prohibitorum*. There is, first of all, the danger of giving scandal. Human nature being what it is, a catalogue of "bad books" - it need hardly be added, in view of what has been written, that this popular synonym for the Index is quite inappropriate- is likely to tempt the curious and the lax. This explains why the actual text is not more familiar to the average Catholic, who is usually acquainted with the names of only a few forbidden authors. Such knowledge is best

reserved for librarians and spiritual directors, who can utilize what they have learned in giving prudent counsel. Nor ought one to neglect observing that these should actually be consulted whenever that is desirable. A considerable amount of mistaken talk is abroad, which glibly assigns books to the Index which have never been placed there, and so does great harm to the reputation of unexceptionable authors.

The second variety of repressive censorship is simply the statement of principles which ought to govern Catholic reading. Upon it the printed Index is dependent, and it offers the conscience easily understandable guidance. What kinds of books are not to be read? Three groups are expressly named, and they may be summarized as follows. First: books which treat of faith and morals in an objectionable manner. This group includes works which foster heresy and schism; which attack the inspirational character of the Sacred Scriptures; which promote superstition; which teach moral errors, such as dueling and suicide; or which are professedly obscene. Second; books devoid of reverence for holy things. Here are meant chiefly such works as offer insult to God, the Church, the Blessed Virgin or the Saints. Third: books which conflict with the right exercise of devotion. The reference is particularly to unauthorized editions of the Bible or to devotional literature not approved by the Church.

All books included in these classes are forbidden, regardless of whether they are specifically named in the Index or not. Most of those listed there can, however, be assigned to one or other of the proscribed groups. The rule thus stated is so simple that almost every intelligent Catholic can apply it to his reading. Indeed he is expected to know and apply it, because literature may be as great a source of temptation as any other created thing. Of course it will not always be immediately obvious that a book fosters heresy, or that it lacks reverence for holiness. The aid to be derived from sound and judicious criticism is therefore most valuable, and is certainly one thing for which the faithful should turn to their periodicals. It goes without saying that the person who looks for the mote in his neighbor's eye while oblivious of the beam in his own is as much out of place in this realm of activity as in any other. The Church has always conceded, for instance, that accuracy and

impartiality are requisite for historical study. If a scholar narrates truth without a coat of flimsy whitewash he is not irreverent but just simply honest.

Ecclesiastical censorship of literature, thus briefly outlined, has been severely criticized and grossly misrepresented. The mere *right* of the Church to judge books from its own authoritative point of view is, as has been said, not frequently denied. Catholics accept the governance of the Holy See because they believe this to have been established by Christ Himself; and there is no reason whatever why they should, at least in principle, fence off literature as the one place which the Church must not enter. Moreover, literary censorship in one form or another is well-nigh universal. Parents supervise the books their children read; states proscribe some varieties of literature; libraries withdraw from circulation such books as are adjudged capable of doing harm; and even the most liberal of the liberals has a private list of works he must not look at. That the *Index* has a definite relation in kind to other forms of censorship is evident from its history. In the beginning the Christian Church made a selection from the writings which narrated the Savior's life on earth. These were defined as authentic, and the rest were condemned as spurious and unsatisfactory. Later on, infinite pains were taken by Fathers and Doctors to isolate and stigmatize heretical books, and Christendom reached the momentous conclusion that the ancient classical authors might be read. During the Middle Ages diverse universities established their own *censura ptaevia*, and efforts to suppress certain books and authors were undertaken by local governments, civil and ecclesiastical. In every country of Europe the right to forbid the publication of a book was considered an unquestioned prerogative of the royal power, and to this the clergy frequently appealed. With the invention of the printing press and the outbreak of the Reformation, more compact and effective measures were required of the embattled Church. These were then inaugurated by the Council of Trent.

There is little argument regarding such matters. Generally the critic of the *Index* builds his case upon individual instances, or upon what he considers mistakes in administration. The most important grievance is that ultraconservative theologians may use the authority of the Church to quash a new idea or to hamper

courageous speculation. That such mistakes are possible - or that some have actually been made - can be admitted without hesitation. The condemnation of a book, as has been said, is an act in no way involving the infallible power of definition which belongs to the Church. One finds in the *Index librorum prohibitorum* nothing more than a series of negative verdicts arrived at by men who, though almost always learned and conscientious, may err, on the basis of literary evidence submitted to them. It is conceivable that they may be prejudiced or that they do not understand.

The criticism, however, does not reckon with two important considerations. First, the triumph of a new idea or discovery does not in any manner depend upon its assimilation by people not prepared to receive it. Who excepting qualified scientists, for instance, have helped to clarify the concept of evolution and to bring it within the narrow range of actual cosmic fact? But thousands have lost spiritual confidence, have suffered shipwreck of the faith, because of the impact of various "evolutionary dogmas" upon their minds. Surely the Church may justly bear in mind the welfare of these, and even forbid during a time the reading of books which, though scientifically useful, might imperil them. Provision is made for scholars and all who for some practical reason may need to acquaint themselves with some volume expressly or implicitly forbidden. The legislation of the *Index* stipulates that permission to read any book may be granted to all who, in the opinion of the rightful authority, are in need of it. Thus (to return to the concept of evolution) there is nothing in all the works of Darwin and his numberless successors which would have passed unnoticed by any Catholic investigator or theologian competent to assist the advance of science or thought.

More difficult to discuss is the stigma which frequently rests - and not seldom most unjustly - upon a writer some of whose work has been officially condemned. In many circles to have one's book placed on the Index is equivalent to losing one's influence as a Catholic author; and that, of course, is especially tragic in the case of a priest or a religious endowed with apostolic fervor. Nor need we overlook that species of ecclesiastical mole who thrives on damaging the reputations of others, or upon attaching whispered suggestions of heresy to honored names. These things lead to

perilous trials for not a few sensitive spirits, and have been the causes of religious tragedy. Of late years the situation has changed considerably for the better, although there is still room for improvement.

All such pettiness is merely rank abuse of the great idea which underlies the *Index*. This, we may say, does not have for its primary object the condemnation of books but the guidance of writers. The best of men is fallible, and genius is often forgetful of the prudence with which the true shepherd herds his flock. To give scandal or to mislead are serious offenses, of which no Catholic wishes to be even unconsciously responsible. And certainly no form of mistaken counsel is so injurious as that congealed into a printed book, which establishes contact not with an individual or an orator's audience but, at least potentially, with thousands of minds about whom the author knows nothing. Therefore the Church strives to safeguard writers from doing unintentional evil, or from giving an erroneous impression of Catholic teaching. If one has acted in good faith, no need exists for feeling that one has somehow forfeited the right to live and work in the shadow of Christ. All that the *Index* demands is humble submission in the interest of the common welfare, or at most the withdrawal of an offending volume. I could name many men who survived the repudiation of some of their writing, and have lived to obtain signal honors from the very ecclesiastical authorities who once opposed them. During the Middle Ages people understood this essential supervisory function of the censoring Church better than they do now. A doctor whose teaching contained a formal error simply repudiated that and went on with his work. As a rule he had far less to fear from Rome than from narrower local officials; and perhaps the foremost reason why the Holy See has since reserved for itself the central office of censorship is that it can thus protect writers from unwarranted attacks and jealousies.

Two instances which are relatively familiar to all illustrate this fact very well. Friar Roger Bacon, the great medieval Franciscan scientist and theologian, may have been rather peppery of disposition, but he was undoubtedly an original thinker. For both reasons he incurred the wrath of his superior, who devised all manner of contrivances for hampering Friar Roger's work. For ten

years he lived in what was, for all practical purposes, a jail. Then he was liberated by Pope Clement IV, who took a deep interest in his writings and for a time valiantly protected him. Owing to the difficulties of travel and of letter writing in those days, Friar Roger was never fully vindicated; but it is impossible to doubt that Rome was his beneficent ally. A second instance may be observed in the life of the fiery Spanish Jesuit, Juan de Mariana. Having published a treatise which at least indirectly taught that tyrannicide was permissible, Mariana had to face the censure of the General of the Society, who repudiated the doctrine and enjoined his priests never to teach it. Nevertheless he was not forced into silence, and later on even braved the wrath of the Spanish Inquisition in order to declare that the King's expedient of adulterating the coinage in order to raise money was unethical. These are two cases selected from hundreds which indicate the impartiality and serenity of Rome as compared with censorship operative locally.

If one now proceeds to consider the fortune of an author who is not a Catholic and who awakes to discover that his books have been placed on the Index, it is well to remember the missionary character of the Church. Commissioned to "teach all nations," the Holy See may most justly point out to an author with all the emphasis possible that his doctrine is wrong when adjudged by the standards of Christ. There is no reason why such a writer should not pause to consider most seriously that his deviation from the noble highway of Catholic Christendom is a matter of grave importance. But though he may decide to "laugh it off," I do not see how he can question the legitimacy of the warning issued by the Church to the faithful. These have chosen a different interpretation of life than his own; and for their fidelity ecclesiastical authority is at least in a measure responsible. Sometimes, of course, it may be hard to understand why a given book has been condemned. But even though mistakes may occasionally have been made, the explanation is, in most cases, not difficult to give.

If all writers and readers accepted the decrees of the *Index* in the right spirit and with the proper understanding, an immense amount of good could be accomplished. Unfortunately no such millennial situation can be expected. Worldly authors whose books are condemned term themselves fortunate because the "sales" almost

always increase as a result. This fact suffices to indicate how vast are the cupidity and self-will of mankind, but it also demonstrates the extreme precariousness of good advice on a matter which, after all, people take so lightly. The great majority read not in order to be introduced to significant ideas or to deepen their understanding of life, but for the sake of pleasurable or scintillating companionship. That this prevailing attitude incorporates a goodly measure of prophylaxis, not many careful observers will deny. Mankind is really a pretty constant factor; and its tragedy lies less in perversion by error than in failure to assimilate the true and beautiful. There can never be a very large audience for great art, and possibly the truly chosen of the Church will always remain, relatively speaking, a handful. Let us have confidence in the magnetic influence of these last. Just as the masterpieces of genius are imitated over and over again for popular consumption, so also are the virtues of the saints cherished, in less luminous forms, even by a world which does not think of prayer. The Church preaches counsels of perfection, even in literature, so that the world may in a measure be redeemed.

It remains to say that the legislation and counsel incorporated in the *Index* have never constituted a danger to literary art as such. Now and then, it may be true, writers of ability may have been alienated or silenced by injudicious bickering. What the Abbé Calvet has termed *l'esprit du sacristie* has done its share of harm. Very little of this can, however, be associated with Rome and the Sacred Congregations. For the most part it has been provincial narrowness or envy, caused by educational or social conditions over which the Church as such has no control. Let us bear in mind that the only poet who has been glorified in a Papal Encyclical is Dante, regarding one of whose books words of official censure were once spoken. Nor should we fail to recall that the patron of Catholic writers is Saint Francis de Sales, whose humanism is among the glories of France. The Church of time and eternity is so seldom inconsiderate that by comparison every other institutionalized society seems monstrously tyrannical.

The Contemporary Renaissance

A theory of relationships between literature and Catholic teaching or tradition is one thing, actual literary history is another. What has been the fortune of Catholic artistic expression during recent years? The only reply this book can offer is a brief, and therefore necessarily disappointing, summary. To this a very few general - and possibly trite - remarks may serve as a preface. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, western civilization has been under the dominion of influences which, for one reason or another, were largely independent of the Church. We therefore usually describe the recent display of Catholic literary energy with the word "renaissance," which is not wholly free from undesirable implications. It suggests something akin to an awakening from the sleep of death, or to getting up from the sick bed. As a matter of fact. Catholic literature has been nearly continuous during the modern time, and has increased in volume and significance whenever a new creative impulse has stirred the world of general letters. This circumstance (which will, I think, be denied by no candid historian) reenforces the previously stated opinion that faith and the writing craft are not in any manner identical - that an increase in religious fervor does not necessarily mean an addition to literary glory, or vice versa. Art follows its own laws, among Catholics as well as other people. Under modern conditions, it is true, literature has become an important missionary instrument, so that one is accustomed to considering it an index to apostolic energy. But the terms of the definition we have agreed upon for the present discussion exclude the great bulk of apologetic writing from consideration.

If we now apply the qualification "contemporary" to the literature written since the establishment of imperialistic nationalism (which is the most recent important change in the universal human outlook and may, roughly speaking, be dated 1870), we shall find it relatively easy to understand both the influences which Catholic writers, as well as others, inherited from the past, and the especial problems confronted in the present. On the whole, the first fifty years of the nineteenth century were devoted to a conflict between the "rationalism" originally formulated by Voltaire and the British

deists, and the "romanticism" first codified by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Romantics usually had the upper hand, as everyone knows; but undiluted rationalism nevertheless proved a dogged opponent, and finally came near to winning the victory. Catholic letters in Europe during this period were efforts to reconstruct the two theses in the spirit of the faith. In France Chateaubriand founded a school of Christian romanticism. German converts, notably Friedrich Schlegel and Clemens Brentano, sponsored a literary "revival" which attempted to deduce from existing hunger for what was old, medieval and primitive that return to the Church was necessary. Novalis himself did not make this return voyage, but was the first to formulate the maxim that Europe must either go back into the Catholic fold or cease to be. To Italy Manzoni gave a new and most attractive conception of the romantic universe, and in England Sir Walter Scott built most of the road that led from the Middle Ages to the Oxford Movement. On the other hand, there was also a Catholic "rationalism," manifest both in the habit of restating scholastic philosophy in terms of intellectual science, and in those tendencies to render doctrine "conformable with reason" which finally developed into "modernism."

These two forms of spiritual orientation share alike in praise and blame. Generalizations are always hazardous, but I have long since thought that some such guess as the following might prove not utterly useless. Christendom was split into fragments during the era of the Renaissance by an effort to return to Saint Augustine and the Fathers. Ecclesiastical worldliness, rationalism and nominalism in the schools, too many rigid formulizations in the expression of theological teaching - these suggested that health might come through recapturing the "inward holiness" of an earlier time. Unfortunately the attempts were hasty and mistaken. Luther discarded all form in order to conserve a conviction erroneously derived from Saint Augustine. The Calvinists and Jansenists likewise misread the great Bishop's analysis of Divine and human relationships. Thus realism (or the genuine universe of reason) and idealism were separated, and reunion could not be effected. The Jesuits struggled valiantly and wisely, but could not prevail. And after their magnificent offensive had been stopped, the world kept on talking of the two things separately, though in more materialistic and far less religious terms. Rousseau is really akin to Luther, as M.

Maritain would have us believe.1 But the plane upon which his ideas live is lower, and identified with emotional rather than religious experience. There is an affinity between Calvin and Zola, but the second thinks of predestination in terms of mere "natural law."

During the distinctively contemporary period, various gifted Catholic writers struggled manfully either to deepen one of the two drifts or to reconcile them. England was probably the scene of the most notable success. Although the Oxford Movement antedates the period under discussion (having passed the moment of greatest vitality by 1850), its greatest protagonist. Cardinal John Henry Newman, began to write *An Essay towards a Grammar of Assent* during 1870. This remarkable book is the knot into which all his reflections; are tied, and remains the outstanding effort to unite the romantic and rationalist points of view. It reaffirms, with a psychological subtlety which would have been impossible prior to the intensive thinking about psychic processes which set in with the late seventeenth century, the Augustinian and Anselmian conceptions of belief; but it insists no less strongly upon the objective characteristics of the Christian position, and especially upon the testimony of history. Here, then, was a synthesis, too complex to be understood immediately, and yet far too simple to be assimilated without almost endless dissection. One who reads criticisms of the *Grammar* will, indeed, be struck with the regularity with which one side of the book is emphasized at the expense of the other.

It is simply impossible to overestimate the influence of this quintessence of Newman. Understandably enough, he had got far beyond the grasp of numerous Catholics, and was utterly unintelligible to many sturdy old agnostics. Some still continue to talk rapturously of his "style," while remaining totally oblivious of his significance. But the bequest of his ideas was as fruitful as is the downpour of a heavy summer rain. A group of thinkers to whom synthesis was important began to appear, one by one. Though most of the English Catholic poets clung to the somewhat romantic notion that they were "seers," they nevertheless reverenced wholeheartedly the objectivity of their faith. Patmore, for all his visionary mysticism, was a rationalist in the just and goodly sense.

When his verse is at its best, one notices in it some of the brilliant hardness of Pope; and he derives many of his loftiest images from the more intellectualist writings of Saint Thomas. To what extent science of all kinds influenced the rhythms of Francis Thompson need not be pointed out to anyone who has read even the most intuitive of his odes. It is, however, less frequently noticed that he derives abundant substance from the most formal aspects of Catholic practice. *The Hound of Heaven* is not an individualist confession, but an appeal to mankind (especially poetic mankind) to act in the spirit of the liturgy. Thompson here makes his *reductio ad absurdum* of romantic aspiration not on the basis of his own experience, but in the very LWords of Mother Church.

Curiously enough, the one really influential attempt to write English Catholic novels - I am referring of course to the work of Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson - carried a Newmanistic thought into something very like an impasse. In his effort to portray effectively the genesis of faith, Benson selected occurrences which seem to render the normal functioning of reason well-nigh impossible. He presents, for example, a man who turns so rigid under the spell of a trance that he is enabled to hear his friends discussing his death, and another whom a series of catastrophic woes - disappointment in love, inherited disease, atrocious suffering - have divorced from life. Into the souls of such men Benson embeds a germ of faith, which matures steadily and convincingly. But it seems obvious to most of us too logical mortals that if faith were rooted in experiences so unusual, it could hardly be a usual, a normal, realization. How far removed from this quite romantic conception the outlook of Newman was will be obvious from a casual reading of his own straightforward *Callista*, wherein faith is almost as matter-of-fact a thing as life itself.

The Benson novels are, however, an excellent illustration of the promptness with which the English Catholic literary movement has approached active currents of thought and feeling. During the years prior to the War, the "unusual" fascinated people who shied away from the merest mention of the "miraculous." Enlightenment was sought from "spirits" and table-rappings, from fairies and hobgoblins. And the Monsignor, eager to win the soul of his generation, labored to prove that when the unusual really occurred,

it revealed the same ancient mystery of faith which had shone forth so radiantly from the marvelous handiwork of the Saviour. Similarly, after the social aspects of life had assumed so great an importance for the modern spectator, Mr. Chesterton, Mr. Belloc and their followers inaugurated a way of regarding justice and charity which possessed, even for those who could not agree with them, the sovereign virtue of a defense of liberty. Their espousal of the "journalist's job" has, indeed, piled up a constant succession of brilliant proofs that the Catholic spirit weds itself instantly and untiringly to every basic modern need and quest. (A more detailed discussion of the English Catholic movement may be found in my *Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature*. New York, 1928.)

The common language is one reason for associating Irish and English letters, but the differences in outlook and inspiration are obvious. Intellectual effort as such has only a small place in the contemporary Celtic "renaissance," the notable weakness of which has been (as Tom Kettle observed clearly) isolation from European culture. Philosophy in Catholic Ireland has been undeniably drab and dusty, excepting in so far as it has entered in certain precious reevaluations of history. Indeed, one cannot discern a single idea by which that Ireland is likely to be remembered in the future. On the other hand, rediscovering a fine Gaelic tradition has induced a new consciousness of emotional and spiritual values, has modified English speech with fresh cadences often hauntingly beautiful, and has enriched religious art expression with the vigor of splendid peasant experience. Modern poetry has produced nothing more delicate or genuine than the lyrics of two groups of Irish Catholic writers: the one, best represented by Katherine Tynan, being content to blend the Celtic thread with the fabric of the English Christian tradition; the other, to which a host of notable poets like James Clarence Mangan, Dora Sigerson, Padraic Colum, Joseph Campbell and Thomas MacDonough have belonged, stirred by the rare wine of the Celtic past.

To understand this last movement, it is necessary to master fully the meaning of Padraic Pearse. He is, it seems to me at least, the key to a modern Catholic Ireland not yet fully realized - a man to whom the highest form of idealism was a moral obligation, and a spokesman for the spiritual senate of our time. Pearse's lyrics and

plays do not express him adequately, both because death (in the form of a political murder) cut him down before maturity, and because the things he signified were too large to say. For his Ireland was a creature unshackled. It had thrown off not merely the chains of political bondage, but also the numberless safety-pins with which it had been tucked into provincial mental clothing. There is nothing more illustrious in the modern world than Pearse's spiritual courage and hope, which was shared by all the nobler spirits of his time. In it one still smells the perfume of a long martyrology and the incense of an essentially Christian resolve.

Though the English effort is in many ways the supreme Catholic literary advance of our time, it is probably not so picturesque as the French achievement. The character of the era under discussion was determined, to a considerable exent, by the defeat of 1871. The Revolution and the political catastrophes which followed it were not, however, more harrowing than the collapse of spiritual enterprise which is often called the "romantic finale." A time of rhetoric and utopias on the one hand, and of skepticism and pessimism on the other, found its most typical spokesmen in Zola, Flaubert, Renan and Taine. Catholics dwelling in the world erected by these men had necessarily to react against them as well as to push forward to new points of rest. Therefore the opening of the new period is marked by fierce oppositions and tensely dramatic outcries. Mysticism became for some a refuge and also a weapon. A new reliance upon reason - upon inference from implacable facts - characterized the thinking of others. At the end, despite difficulties and perils, a definite realignment had been effected.

During quite a number of years, Barbey d'Aurevilly welded together loyalty to Catholic principle, dandyism and a fondness for the methods of Sir Walter Scott into a formula of antagonism to his time. From our point of view his best gifts were a mastery of luminous phrasing and a lucid common sense. Barbey's work, however, was sprinkled both with curious intuitions redolent of "mysticism" and with flashes of insight that were remarkable religious experiences. He therefore lighted the way for Joris Karl Huysmans, to whom the mystics were more solid and indispensable. Huysmans began life as an artistic literateur, with a passion for realistic epithets and a disgust with everything real. *A Vau-l'eau*,

wherein an unfortunate fellow walks the treadmill of infinite ennui, is fairly representative of all his earlier books, which distil bitter misanthropy from life scenes as carefully drawn as the paintings of the Flemish masters. Gradually, however, this acrid man discovered that there is always something more stupid than what had seemed bottomless stupidity, and something more filthy than the incredibly vile. Out of this "endeavor to reach the depths" he harvested the conviction that evil is metaphysically (or spiritually) real, and must not be construed as merely a series of defects in the operation of the cosmic mechanism. The tediousness of unbelief and compromise is congealed into *Á Rebours*, the abysmal ugliness of sin into *Là-Bas*.

From this point, an ultimate of one sort, Huysmans began to ascend toward Christianity in his own peculiar manner. Adverse critics have often professed to feel that he was only galvanizing a new set of sensations in order to enjoy them more fully; but everything about the man's personal life - his sacrifices and burdensome physical ills, his desire for holiness and his unstinting devotion to a cause - substantiates the testimony of his books and makes one sure that, though he may have been mistaken, Huysmans was absolutely in earnest. Mysticism he held to be a path of redemption for the individual as well as a satisfactory explanation of the human universe. It is, of course, a mysticism closely bound up with art. He considered beauty so indispensable to living in the sight of God, according to the counsel of the Church, that he outdid Durandus in symbolistic interpretation. The most important thing he had to relate was, however, his own story, in which the honest attempt to rise superior to the flaccid interpretations of man then current is an expression of a great personal need and of an abiding realization.

En Route narrates the history of his conversion, and is a graphic book rich with enthusiastic impressions of monastic fervor. It incorporates a sincere *mea culpa*, which dozens of weather-beaten moderns have repeated, and an humble appreciation of the Cistercian ideal. At bottom the soul here revealed is that of a very human and eccentric Pascal, lovable less on account of his virtue than because of his hard-earned victory over weakness. The book having been written, Huysmans was on fire with the glory of a newly discovered Catholic country. It is not surprising that he should have seen many things with surpassing clarity. It is also

understandable that, he should have believed the rest of the world quite blind, so that upbraiding it became a moral duty - and, one must confess, a pleasure. *La Cathedrale* is a fascinating mixture of religious insight, mistaken archeology and bitter invective. It is more than a little false to the true history of Chartres, but it manages better than any other monograph to put one in the proper frame of mind to understand that matchless edifice. The other books - *l'Oblat, Les Foules de Lourdes, Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam* - continue the exposition of a mystical Catholicism and a liturgical art, interspersing sacred lore with savoury pages of vehement denunciation.

Huysmans accomplished the extraordinary feat of wedding the mind of an ultra-modern literary man with the hidden mysteries of a faith which he loved particularly well in medieval dress. But because his work was a chronicle of personal religious experience based upon a fundamentally pessimistic reaction to life, he suggests Pascal. The same great figure comes to mind when one confronts the career of Leon Bloy. If literature were primarily the record of extraordinary personalities, the books of this singular thinker and artist would be more precious than Shakespeare. Bloy, as much a visionary as Blake himself (it is odd that English names should prove so useful in describing this Frenchman), was overwhelmingly conscious of a mission. In fact he seems to have been almost unconscious of all else. Feeling that to him there had been entrusted a task analogous to those which had engaged the Hebraic prophets, he was at one and the same time the advocate of integral mysticism and the scourge of contemporary Christianity. Bloy was a sardonic detective unmasking all opportunism. Sanctity and that only satisfied him. Alone among the French writers of his time, he knew what poverty is in the modern world and how things are judged from its point of view. *Le Deséspere* is not the easiest book in the world to read, for the simple reason that it repeats the invitation Christ extended to the rich young ruler so effectively that all enjoyment of what the French term "bourgeois comfort" is dissipated.

During much of his life Bloy was an indefatigable if unheeded pamphleteer. Mingling violence with unforgettable intuitions, he left a record of his time and a profession of faith which needed the

perspective posterity alone could supply. I am not far from believing that he is destined to be considered the most important French writer of his epoch, especially in the eyes of those who cannot view existence apart from the appalling moral decay which everywhere looks out from under the veneer of civilization. But it must be said that he claimed for himself a vast measure of freedom, criticizing the ecclesiastical realm as ferociously as he flayed atheism. In so far as he is unbalanced, he lacks the equilibrium which is somehow rarely companioned with genius. Faith in the purest, most ultimate sense was incarnate in him, and he poised a divining rod over shams which today seems astonishingly accurate. There never was a stranger man - a weaker or a mightier, a simpler or a more chaotic, according as one estimates him.

In poetry something of the same return to what we must be content to call mysticism, or an understanding of life as darkness illuminated by the light of sacraments, was manifest in the poetry of the 1890's. There is no space here for a summary of the movement termed Symbolist, or even for a critique of the leading writers associated with it. Paul Verlaine shook hands with Villon across the centuries, although, for all his lapses and contritions, he never sank so low as that scamp blessed only occasionally with repentance. The finest of his gentle and wraith-like lyrics, in which a melody often seems to have been woven in the air as a smoker intertwines rings of vapour, are evocations of the mercy which qualifies forgiveness of sins. John Charpentier calls him a "Celtic" poet, meaning that his stanzas repeat the element in French tradition which is more shadowy than Roman thought and which became magniloquent for the first time in Erigena.

It is curious, however, that the same "religious inquietude" which one discerns so clearly in Sagesse should also be so powerful in the poetic cadences of Baudelaire, whose style has frequently been compared with the art of hammering out tempered copper. *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which dominated literary conversation during more than a decade, was practically a duplicate expression of the experience which made a *converti* of Huysmans. There is the same desire to rise toward goodness and metaphysical certainty by way of the ladder of art, and the same dizziness on the brink of unplumbed evil. Baudelaire's progress, however, was neither so

marked nor so individual as that of Huysmans. Indeed French verse began to be definitely Christian only in the more tender poetry of Francis Jammes, who gave symbolism a deliciousness it had not previously seemed capable of, and, after a long Franciscan pilgrimage, came to the spiritual resting place where *Georgiques chrétiennes*, a lyrical hymn to the peace that crowns a life spent close to nature and God, could be written. In his work mysticism was retained, but colored with the fragrance of Umbrian sanctity and the happy lucidity of the Basque.

To a great extent all this reliance upon what the Church has termed the "contemplative attitude" may have been due to the steady usurpation of reason by agnostic science. After 1870 French savants did their thinking less in terms of Darwin than in terms of John Stuart Mill. Nature study was hardly of paramount importance to a people for whom "civilization" would always remain the fundamental postulate of reason. Criticism of religion, as formulated during the eighteenth century and reenforced by Germanic scholarship, ended in the typical instance of Renan. Here was a man who retained throughout life a desire, even a need, for faith, and who nevertheless wrote about Christianity as if it were nothing more than an interesting theory. Sociology, which was then a search for the "natural laws" governing social relationships, produced the honest gloom of Hippolyte Taine, who made both the best ethical defense of Catholicism and the most powerful attack upon its veracity. Yet it was only natural that many should quickly discover that moral need is at least a "pragmatic" argument for veracity. This was not the tap-root of Pascal's illustrious certainty, but that great thinker had, at least, used it for a buttress. And was not Honore Balzac a man who had written dozens of novels to show how utterly dependent French society was upon the authoritative social guidance of the Church?

The last decade of the nineteenth century had not yet opened when two events of importance revealed the growing effectiveness of this reasoning. Ferdinand Brunetiere, celebrated critic and implacable logician, surprised everyone with the story of his conversion - *Sur le chemin de croyance*. However far from satisfactory the reasoning chronicled in this book may have seemed to trained theologians, it testified to clear consciousness of the spiritual dearth of the hour;

and the authoritativeness of the author provoked something like a crisis in university circles all too confidently anti-Christian. Almost at the same time Paul Bourget, then famed as a discerning interpreter of literary personalities and as a novelist of amorous passion, wrote *Le Disciple* to voice the conviction that a writer is responsible for evil deeds committed by those who accept the principles he sponsors as rules of conduct. "There is not a single honest man of letters," declared the preface, "who ought not to tremble with the sense of his responsibility." The book seemed to visualize Taine. However that may be, its author, joining hands with Pascal, Balzac and the sociologist Le Play, then began to write a new *comedie humaine*, which developed steadily into a long series of thesis-novels designed to show that only Christian morality can save the personality, in the one or in the many, from complete collapse. One may question the validity of this type of argument. But it has really been the antidote to - and, even more, the outcome of - what the past century called "social verities" and which were supposed to have undermined all belief in the supernatural.

Similar defenses of reason in the fundamentally Catholic sense, many of them documented from science and history, continued to appear. Not a few of the novels of Rene Bazin and Henri Bordeaux are variations of the Bourget formula, weaned now from the too insistent concern with illicit love which had tinged even such good books as *Le Démon de Midi* with monotony, but also made less vigorous and compelling. "Moral pragmatism" of a similar variety may well have been the concept which won so many excellent Catholics for the program of l'Action Francaise. Under the leadership of Charles Maurras, a brilliant positivist, this had proposed a union between the Church and a modified Comtean brotherhood for the sake of rescuing civilization. With the dolorous history of this alliance we cannot concern ourselves here. What happened was bound to occur, particularly since the fortunes of the Church in France had virtually been identified by many with the triumph of a political party. Meanwhile other factors had come to the fore, producing a new state of mind.

These will be more easily understandable, perhaps, if one approaches them through the mediumship of two personalities whose significance it is, at present, still impossible to measure.

Charles Péguy, who had published Socialist books and written some of the most remarkable prose of the age, was probably never "converted" in the sense of compliance with all the specifications laid down for that act. But the intellectual advance of Péguy toward Catholicism, to which he gave, at last, the fullest allegiance of mind and heart, is the most fully representative pilgrimage of the time. This man of the people, endowed with singular tenacity of purpose and fluidity of understanding, sounds so many notes that have been dominant in modern French life that one finds him an almost bafflingly complete index. There was, first of all, the philosophy of Bergson, to which Péguy remained faithful, and which may be described most simply as a belief that the world explains itself through gestures rather than through death-masks. In other words, reality must not be identified with convenient abstractions proposed by mental habit, because these are at best only a consensus of memories regarding what actuality was. The real world can be, for us, simply an experience of basic verities - a recognition, difficult to attain, of ultimates that are in action, are personal, are impermanently (so far as we as perceptive beings are concerned) permanent.

Péguy clung to the interpretation of life which Bergsonism included, but did not follow its inclination toward pantheism. He was, moreover, fervently sociological, although his convictions were worlds removed from those of Taine. No man was more highly endowed with the peculiar modern awareness of social realities. Péguy sensed the crowd of his class and people round about every one of his thoughts and deeds. A strange, shadowy democracy of affections and customs, of needs and confidences - which he defined as a *mystique* without limiting the word painstakingly - characterized his mind as one over which "consciousness of the others" held sway. It is not an easy matter to describe. The best one can do is to recommend a careful reading of his *mystères* - notably the *Mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc* - in which a new colloquialism, or oralism, of utterance was introduced into French letters. These inaugurated a fresh impulse back to Catholicism. The Church was now seen not as the "support" of a throne, or as a set of rules for the proper bringing up of the young citizen, but once again as a community of saints and strugglers, of pilgrims and pamphleteers, of children and their fathers living or dead.

There is no room here for more than these flitting remarks concerning Charles Péguy who, like so many of the generation to which he belonged, died fighting in order that "war might end war." Indeed it would be difficult for me to express all I have learned to love in him - the tireless searcher to whom more than a few will be in debt forevermore. In a sense he seems more significant than even Paul Claudel, though far less finished and complete an artist. There are manifest similarities between the two men: of language, since both have revived the habit of improvisation: of spiritual quest, because both arrived in the shadow of the House of God; and of inward understanding, for both have been vanquishers of Jansenism and rigidity of soul. In Claudel, however, the sense of a corporate humanity is more metaphysical. Those who have read *Art Poetique*, one of the few great meditations of the modern time, understand the conception of the world as an interlocking harmony - a universal melody in which God has assigned a certain appropriate stave to every individual, which Claudel proposes as an explanation of man.

The theme is reexpressed in his dramas, each one of which speaks symbolically of the obedience which man's free will owes to the Divine desire. They are the poems of a Christian Aaschylus, whose fate is a consuming love, and have been designed far less for a stage than for comparison with the tremendous pageant in which the race itself acts. Passion is strong in all of them, and there is a manifest earthiness, a vigorous wealth of sheer vitality in *Tête d'Or*, *l'Otage* and *l'Annonce faíte à Marie*. But for Claudel the grim "law" which governs all is not instinct or necessity, but the Savior's prayer - *fiat voluntas tua*. As an artist this "creator of new rhythms" is sometimes harsh and primitive, writing with peasant-like stubbornness to plumb to the roots of an idea without any of the normal hesitancies of "literature." Again, he can be a marvelously evocative poet, as in the beautiful passage of *l'Annonce faíte à Marie* which begins,

Comme toute la création est avec Dieu dans un mystère profond,

or in the magnificent odes which remind an English reader of Milton at his best.

No aspect of Claudel is more noteworthy, however, than the

naturalness with which he blends the purposes of literary endeavor with the duties of a diplomatic career and the exigencies of a lofty spiritual resolve. However dark and needlessly turbulent many of his pages may be, the qualities of strength and faith, devotion and hope, are clear in them all, so that (like Jacques Riviere, one of his most faithful critics) one follows the thought or the image with a kind of grateful awe. Precisely this is responsible for the influence his work has had upon younger men in his own country and elsewhere. Claudel's dramatic achievement is probably not destined to change the character of writing for the theater, which must always be something more popular and less exalted than the dramatic poems he has enriched with his whole mind; but he has upheld the major functions of the poet with a fidelity and unselfishness which no man who loves literature can venture to ignore.

In so far as one is able to judge, few of the "younger generation" among French Catholic writers are direct descendants of Péguy and Claudel. But forces which these express and goals which these envisage recur in very many, who prefer to see their masters in Maurice Barres (who was, in all his better moments, a seeker after spiritual Reality), in the Russian novelists (for through the mediumship of the Count de Vogue Dostoievski and his fellows came to exert a profound influence upon the French), or to the standards set by seventeenth-century classical humanism. It would be interesting to follow the new movement through philosophy, to which the thought of Maurice Blondel, the mystical inquiries of the Abbe Henri Bremond, and the perceptive Thomism of Pere Sertillanges have probably meant more than the better advertised scholasticism of Jacques Maritain and his group. The average English reader, however, is more intimately acquainted with some of the novelists: Francois Mauriac, of whose dramatic and moving stories the recently translated *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, is a good example; Émile Baumann, author of *Le Fer sur l'Enclume*, who has probably been more deeply appreciated by the Germans than by the English; and Georges Bernanos, whose *Sous le Soleil de Satan* was a literary sensation and vastly more. In all these one discerns an evident attachment to Pascal, a new concern with moral values and a hunger for a metaphysics capable of satisfying the peculiar craving for that new synthesis of subjective and objective reality

which haunts every distinctly modern soul. To a considerable extent, the same characteristics reappear in recent French poetry, some of which has grown quite revolutionary in form (Max Jacob) or realistic in essence (Henriette Charasson). Unfortunately we cannot pause to discuss individual writers or tendencies.

Broadly speaking, the modern French Catholic revival has restated in its own terms every impetus basic to the contemporary literary movement as a whole. Like Newman it has addressed the mind of the age and sought to answer prevalent earnest questions. Of course it would be too much to say that it has out-distanced other French writing either in popularity or significance. But one can affirm that the French themselves have found the truest image of their country's mind not in Anatole France or even Andre Gide, but in some of the men we have named. Their activity has exerted a profound influence upon diverse forms of scholarship and journalism. Its reverberation in the world's mind has been tremendous; and once the controversy round about l'Action Francaise has subsided, there may be a fresh ascent to the spiritual heights upon which the destinies of an age are decided.

The primary difference between France and Germany is that despite all efforts to promote civic solidarity, something like spiritual separatism still prevails in the second country. Religion is present in Germany to-day in three major forms - Catholicism, Lutheranism and theosophy. Marked differences of temperament and outlook have always separated north and south, in a manner not suggested by the *midi* and *nord* of France. Very noticeable, too, are the contradictories of materialism and idealism, romanticism and classicism. The Germans have, in fact, been unified only by a common consciousness of an alien world beyond their borders - a circumstance which has not infrequently made life harder for Catholics. Generally speaking, the Catholic faith is identified with the Rhenish and Bavarian south; and there are varying degrees of attachment to Austrian tradition. The political circumstances which this localization involved after 1870, the peculiar character of the counter-reformation in Germany, the influence of Lutheranism and of the universities - all these helped to give Teutonic Catholicism a commendable "inwardness," a less appealing prodigality of organizations, and a quite unfortunate "inexpressiveness." During

the heyday of the romantic period, a number of converts had sponsored dreams of a new Romanum imperium and a correspondingly illustrious intellectual renaissance. To a more modern time, the unsteadiness of their temperaments and the limitations of their views were too apparent to encourage any marked enthusiasm for their really important ideas; and we of the present turn rather to the more native writers of pre-contemporary German literature: Annette von Droste-Hulshoff, still the greatest of her country's religious poets; and Martin Sailer, who was in a measure the German Newman, - whose interpretation of spiritual experience was undoubtedly colored by the problematical character of the age in which they lived.

With the close of the nineteenth century, no honest spectator could avoid seeing that the Catholic voice was without impact upon the intellectual or social life of the country. Despite the successes of the Center Party, the fragmentary literature and philosophy which represented the mind of the Church was hardly attractive to the faithful themselves. A group of notable scholars - historians and sociologists, for the most part - had emerged, but the absence of organic confidence was plain at any of the universities. Then two men appeared with ideas of reconstruction. Karl Muth, founder and editor of *Hochland* (a magazine which is by all odds the best index to the documentary evidence bearing upon the subject we are discussing) sponsored a program that was original and even daring. He proposed, first of all, certain repudiations - of the idea that Catholic intellectual action must forever be locked up in a "ghetto"; of the notion that romanticism was the sole possible religious formula; and of the statement that everything modern was necessarily "modernistic." Publishing novels and essays which attempted to express a Catholic view of contemporary world life, he startled and annoyed many who were not ready for this kind of doctrine.

The most resolute opposition to Muth came from Austria. Richard von Kralik, a brilliant convert to the Church, proposed a synthesis of "traditionism" in which the cardinal principles of romanticism were associated with the universality of the Church in the modern world. He defined civilization as a vast Graeco-Roman-Catholic accumulation, which was not in any manner an array of dead facts

or historical events, but a steady growth of energy which needed to be set at work solving the problems of the present day. Fundamentally, of course, Kralik was thinking of the Church in terms of the so-called "Austrian mission," which (at least in theory) has been given the duty of conserving the fulness of both faith and culture, and of transmitting these to the nations of southeastern Europe. Muth, for his part, occupied the position of a Catholic in a country basically detached from the source of religious solidarity and imperiled by the possibility that the spirit of the Faith might be isolated from every important national intellectual or social effort. Unfortunately Kralik allowed himself to be dragged into an attack upon *Hochland*, the editor of which replied so tellingly that the Austrian movement, in which there was much good, was saved from collapse only by a process of artificial feeding.

Apart from the magnicent efflorescence of scholarship in virtually all fields (to describe which would require vastly more space than is at our disposal here), virtually all the newer German Catholic literature of importance has grown up around the *Hochland* group. In the novel, Enrica von Handel-Mazzetti, an Austrian noblewoman, rejuvenated the historical novel and introduced new motives into the art of fiction. *Jesse und Maria* (her best novel by a great deal) and *Meinrad Helmperger's Denkwürdiges Jahr* make great drama out of the religious conflicts which distracted and appalled the sixteenth century. The method is usually qualified as baroque - that is, it is highly colored, vivid with psychological antitheses and indulgent to exaggerated emotional imagery. If the work of Handel-Mazzetti had kept to its best level, she would assuredly be one of the most influential of living novelists. But the magnificent energy flagged, and the drama turned into theatrical display. As a result the most highly respected contemporary fiction writers of this group are Peter Dorfler, a priest-novelist who combines humor and delicate sentiment with vast learning; Franz Herwig, a veteran author whose *Eingeengten*, a study of post-bellum Berlin, seems to me quite the most successful effort to write social drama in modern terms from a Catholic point of view; and Karl Linzen, who studies the "inner lives" of his characters in a manner reminiscent of Henry James.

More aloof from group activity of every sort, the lovable Swiss priest Heinrich Federer triumphed bravely over physical handicaps

and wrote a series of novels one more charming than the other. *Papst und Kaiser im Dorf*, which won the national literary prize, is faithful to the life it describes, imaginatively genial and warm with spiritual sympathy. Federer excelled also in the ruminative essay and the briefer forms of narrative. Akin to him in several ways, but more sentimental and visionary, is Paul Keller, whose *Sohn der Hagar* is possibly the most widely read modern German novel. More recently a young woman, Paula Grogger, won the applause of discriminating critics with *Das Grimmingtor*, a study of Tyrolese life which seems to rank with the best "regional" fiction of Europe. This must suffice to characterize the German Catholic novel of to-day. Though not comparable with the work of the French at their best, it offers much more of substance and art than English readers have, until now, shown a disposition to realize.

The poetic development is highly significant. At least three poets of the war era - Reinhard Sorge, Heinrich Lersch and Georg Trakl - may be said to have acquired international repute. Por the moment three gifted women writers are possibly most representative of a growing body of poets. Agnes Miegel belongs to a relatively older generation, and is famous for ballads of a surprising dramatic and evocative power. Ruth Schaumann, well-known as an artist in metal, wood and stone, is the author of several volumes - notably *Der Rebenhag* - which express better than any other work I know the loftiest moods of contemporary Catholic Germany. Here one discerns a genuine affiliation with the mystics, Angelus Silesius and the rest, who are so closely identified with Teutonic spiritual experience, and a delicately sure sense of lyric form. Gertrud von der Fort is the most notable of those who have tried to make the German language do what Paul Claudel has succeeded in accomplishing. Among the distinctively Austrian poets one must note the older Richard von Schaukal, who combines marvelous perfection of form with inspirational vigor, and the younger Heinrich Suso Waldeck (at least from the point of view of literary dates), whose published verse is the essence of a priestly career and of joint mourning with a world laid low by catastrophe.

Since Germany has long been the home of serious drama, it is not astonishing that Catholic artists should have taken a prominent part in efforts to work for the best traditions of the stage. When the

Biihnenvolksbund, an association for the promotion of a popular Christian theater, was organized as an interconfessional society, Catholic critics and playwrights assumed a large share of the burden. The lead was taken by Leo Weismantel, whose Totentanz 1921 and other plays are appreciated even in non-Germanic countries. Weismantel has striven to create morality dramas of a sort calculated to appeal to twentieth-century audiences; and combining as he does poetic fervor with a daring technique, his work interests even those whom it does not convince. To some extent he has been influenced by the movement known as Expressionism; but this took its origin - or nearly so - with Reinhard Sorge, who died in battle before his ripest fruit had been garnered. It would be easy to mention other playwrights; but the point to note regarding the newer German work is the earnestness with which it has tried to grapple with the problems of the contemporary stage and its avoidance of merely negative criticism or simon-pure goody-goodness.

The post-war era, hostile to so much that was old and venerable, has brought many a severe trial to the Catholic Church in Germany. That not all soldiers survived the test of faith imposed by four years of brutality and a subsequent debacle is easy enough to understand but regrettable nevertheless. Far more pernicious was the wave of pleasure-seeking which followed hard on the period when sacrifices of every sort were demanded of human beings all too seldom heroic. To how great an extent the loss to religious energy must be considered permanent remains to be seen. What cannot be questioned is that the Church means more now to German men of thought and character than it has meant for centuries. The change in the orientation of philosophy has brought, to begin with, a new confidence in the objective universe and in the testimony this affords of the Divine mind. One can easily exaggerate the significance of the contemporary "metaphysical revolution," but the mere fact that it has actually occurred is a spiritual landmark. Phenomenology, or the contemplation of qualities as characteristics of the universe, did much to advance a "spiritual objectivism," which in turn fostered a new realistic critique of Kant. In the second place, a liturgical revival, sponsored by the Benedictines but promoted by diverse other groups, has awakened a new understanding of the Church as an abiding spiritual community.

Finally the ardent theology of younger Jesuits (notably Fathers Lippert and Pryzwara) has incorporated a promise of healing for many. Thus the German scene is rich with multiform encouragement, and blends naturally with the general European Catholic landscape.

This, has almost everywhere something significant to offer. Poland, for years a battleground and now the scene of a hazardous social experiment, has produced a literature which in some respects is very great. Here we must restrict the field to two well-known novelists. Henrik Sienkiewicz, who brought to a close the movement of eager confidence in mystical nationalism which began with the poet Miekiewicz, used the history of his country as a brand with which to fire the dreams of persecuted peasants; and it was more powerful than arms would have been against the tyranny of modern autocrats. Few greater romances than *With Fire and Sword*, *The Deluge* and *Pan Michael* have ever been written. Their virtue lies less in pageant-like evocations of buried glory than in the author's supreme poetic ability to endow the innately futile human adventure with everlasting spiritual significance. Sienkiewicz is the only romancer I know of who can describe the death of a hero without awakening resentment or sentimental disappointment in the reader. Here he resembles the masters of epic and even, occasionally, Shakespeare himself.

For altogether different reasons, Ladislas Reymont likewise compelled men to compare him with the very great. *The Peasants* is the chronicle of Polish struggle with, and triumph over, the soil. Grasping the numberless aspects of everyday peasant life and dealing straightforwardly with every emotion that rises in simple, earthbound hearts, it concentrates upon a few individual but nevertheless symbolic men and women, whose adventures are stark and unpremediated as the deeds of nature. Reymont, delving, scrupulous, kaleidoscopic and possibly devoid of notably superior intellectual gifts, nevertheless saw life grandly, with a profound reverence for the soul. There is kinship with Homer in the unswerving directness with which the conflicts in his masterpiece are set forth. First is the fierce, elemental battle for possessions, which neither earth nor men will yield excepting on payment of youth and vital strength. Even more impressive is the impact of

love, which centers round the mysterious figure of Yagna who, unfathomable because elemental, is perhaps the most extraordinary character in Polish letters. Like Helen of Troy, she is the shaper of destinies and the destroyer of lives - a sinister but undesigning creature, in whom the law of nature exists unmodified. Finally, the rugged peasant's groping for spiritual life is exemplified in the thousand ways whereby he reads into the perennially visible the unseen, the eternally beautiful into the temporal crassness of this life. No doubt Reymont has created something like a Polish Christian mythology, if one may use such a term; and readers of *The Peasants* are not likely to forget the mystical loveliness of such passages as that in which old Boryna, dying, sees Paradise while he sows imaginary wheat.

From Poland to the Scandinavian north is a short distance geographically, but to the historian of culture it seems a long way from a country where Catholic belief is part of daily life as nowhere else, perhaps, excepting in Ireland, to a region where that faith died out almost completely in the wake of religious wars. Yet one might easily show that the magnificent efflorescence of northern literature during the nineteenth century involved a not inconsiderable concern with Catholic civilization. Ibsen, Bjornson and especially Selma Lagerlof are rich in borrowings from the universe of the Church. Naturally, however, these contacts could become positive only after the conversion of a notable writer, to whom the Scandinavian and the Catholic past were plainly identical. In the novels of Sigrid Undset this union has been effected. In many respects these books seem the greatest fiction yet written in the Catholic spirit, with full consciousness of modern life. A reader unprepared for the frankness of *Kristin Lavransdatter*, which conceals nothing discerned by a woman of wide experience, may find it disconcerting. But to those who are convinced that faith must span the gulf between the abyss of man's desolation to the heights of Divinely ordained redemption, these saga-like novels will prove revealing and consoling in a measure now to be expected only very rarely of literature.

Italian and Spanish culture have been nearly at a standstill during the whole modern epoch, despite the appearance of influential local groups. The movement inaugurated by Alessandro Manzoni, whose

I Promessi Sposi is still the masterpiece of romantically minded Catholicism, found its only significant continuation in the work of Antonio Foggazaro. In his time, however, the grip of liberalism upon educated minds had become so strong, and the retreat of many Catholics from attempts to influence opinion so marked, that Fogazzaro almost perished in the struggle to achieve adjustment. It is characteristic that his strongest work. *Piccolo Mondo Antico*, should most clearly reflect the influence of Manzoni, and that his most sentimental and unbalanced book, *Il Santo*, should mirror the contemporary mind. For all his genuine worth and lofty vision, Fogazzaro remained a searcher after shadows - a man without an intellectual soil. I am sorry that Giovanni Papini does not seem to have advanced beyond a similar arid detachment, though his own mystical fervor is impressive and representative enough. The famous *Life of Christ* is (at least it seems so to me) almost everything that a remotely adequate biography of Our Lord ought not to be; and yet it satisfied peculiar existing needs so well that one must concede to it the value of a tonic. It is a book crammed with rhetoric not merely blatant but also harrowingly provincial; and something of the same vehement isolation from the actual life of the age characterizes Papini's ventures into philosophy and criticism. No doubt he is growing mellower and more perceptive. Unfortunately enough, if he should fail to mature into leadership. Catholic Italy must await a new generation to find its voice.

In Spain the work of the voluminous historian, Menendez y Pelayo, restored the enthusiasm of many for the spiritual traditions of the country. Social problems and human anxieties cannot, however, be settled entirely on the basis of records; and one is not greatly astonished to see that much of the vital literature of the new Spain has been forced, regrettably enough, into an attitude of iconoclasm. To a mere American it must always seem that attempts to preserve the regulation number of stitches in a royal shirt are not necessarily apostolic deeds, however useful they may be from a social point of view. Spanish traditionalism nevertheless conserves the eminent virtue of sincere fidelity to a discipline, a popular habit, bequeathed by Christendom. That this can be a source of literary energy was apparent in the work of the great modern realists who took Cervantes for their model. Padre Luis Coloma, master of incisive social analysis, is probably the only first-rate Jesuit novelist in

history. Sometimes the fiction of Palacio Valdes was also definitely Catholic in inspiration.

Concha Espina is the representative Catholic novelist of contemporary Spain. *La Esfinge Maragata* (published in English as *Mariflor*) is an evocation of Spanish provincial life and something more. The author's carefully chosen words describe not merely a part of Spain, a forgotten village, a segment of humanity off the beaten track, but also the spiritual forces which, through the ages, have created this humanity - faith and deeply rooted constancy, habits that accrue with passing generations, and custom that sits as naturally as a head does on a throat. *El Metal de Los Muertos* (The Metal of the Dead) is a story of life in the mines of Rio Tinto, and culminates with a great labor uprising. It is a poignant outline of communal human tragedy, and (like Ladislas Reymont's *The Promised Land*) deals with a problem which, more than any other, has challenged the Christian heart in our time.

Conclusions

If this imperfect bird's-eye view of the situation be accepted as a fairly suggestive summary of much excellent work, the reader many wonder if any general characteristics of contemporary European Catholic mentality can be discerned. I can give only a tentative answer to his query; but though it have no other value, it may at least serve to awaken interest in the subject. First, one may note a deepened concern with the mystical element of religion - with the mystery of faith, as that is realized in prayer and contemplative vision. This is not necessarily bound up with inquietude (or allied to romantic intuition, as the Abbe Bremond sometimes appears to believe), but may strive, in an almost classic manner, to live in consonance with the infinite calm and perfection of God. So many searching studies of mysticism from the Catholic point of view have been carried through (by the Baron von Hugel in England, Otto Karrer in Germany, Pere Pourrat in France, Pere Mareschal in Belgium) that some understanding of the matter is demanded of everyone who wishes to understand Catholic life in Europe to-day. Needless to say, mystical tendencies of all sorts are very evident in modern times. Each of the multiform varieties of Orientalism, from Buddha to Apollonius, has its sponsors or at leasts its dabblers; and to the need thus laid bare Catholic tradition is trying to minister.

Secondly, the intelligence has been obliged to envisage a wider territory than was discernible in older eras. Fifty years ago, only the bravest of Catholic thinkers investigated those subjects, or forms of thought, which were considered unconventional. Although this habit established a kind of quarantine against possible infection, it was basically unnatural and dangerous. Vitality and exercise are indispensable to an effective apostolate. Just as the Church utilized pagan experience to erect the artistic synthesis, so also it must employ modernity to build up a new intellectual mastery. European Catholicism in our time is most scrupulously studious of history, as may be learned from the biographies of Hartmann Grisar and Otto Schnitzer, or from the art commentaries of Emile Male. It is also fully conscious of the import of Biblical criticism and the science of comparative religion, having produced eminent authorities in both fields. The *Société scientifique de Bruxelles*, to the excellence of which

numerous publications attest, was founded to prove that there can be no conflict between science and religion. Modern Catholic thinking has likewise dealt frankly with psychoanalysis, with experimental psychology and burrowing anthropology - in short, with every form of investigation calculated to supply mankind either with information regarding its nature or with light on the essential problems of the soul.

Thirdly, the sense of the community has been restored, from two distinct points of view. On the one hand there prevails a ready understanding of contemporary social problems and a willingness to confront these with honest practicality. Sociological motivations have long since invaded the field of *belles lettres*, but as pure theory or as study of fact they have now endowed Catholic thinking with a remarkable richness of outlook. I cannot name or discuss even the dozen most prominent thinkers, but I shall venture to remark that so comparatively new a concept as international conciliation and cooperation has called forth a distinctly Catholic literature widely regarded as authoritative. Who does not see that Pax, the movement created by Count Romanet and fostered by his fellows of the French aristocracy, is both a sign of the times and a proof of vigor? In the second place, the vision of the Church itself as a community, a throng of saints and militant souls, has become immeasurably more vivid as a result of the liturgical revival, concerning which something has already been said in this book. This also is destined to modify more and more noticeably the sources from which literature in the Catholic sense is to be derived.

By comparison with all this European activity, the scene in the United States is likely to seem, at first sight, a little bare and commonplace. During recent years, it is true. Catholic periodical literature has registered much progress. *The Catholic World*, founded by Father Isaac Hecker and ably carried on by other Paulists, has made a commendable effort to keep abreast of the time. *Thought*, founded by the Jesuits, endeavors to provide an outlet for valuable scholarly papers. *The Catholic Educational Review* is, all things considered, a notable educational journal. *Orate Fratres*, conducted by the Benedictines to foster liturgical observance, has (though the fact is not widely realized) completely revolutionized devotional literature. For years *America* has been the journal of Jesuit opinion.

In *The Commonweal*, founded and edited by laymen, an effort has been made with considerable success first to span the gulf between religious and secular journalism. That there are still other journals of significance no one will deny. I must let them serve as illustrations of and introductions to American Catholic letters, discussion of which lack of space renders impossible here. These are, it is necessarily assumed, better known to the average reader of the present book than is the work of European writers.

Manifestly, one great reason why development has proceeded at so slow a pace is the lack of what may be termed "social reference." With the exception of the Boston Irish, no group specifically Catholic has identified itself with the history of culture in the United States. Individual writers have reflected either the milieu in which their conversion took place, or the abstract generalities of the faith which are common to all independently of human stratification. A curious instance is the work of Frank Spearman. Prior to his appearance as a religious novelist, Mr. Spearman wrote stories, concerned for the most part with western life, which expressed the meaning of a given social amalgamation with realistic definiteness. His later and more Catholic books, however, are not "localized" at all: his Fond du Lac is a colorless and unidentifiable place, and his people are minus form. This change is obviously not Mr. Spearman's fault. Granted the overwhelmingly Protestant character of the scene, it is difficult to see how a writer inside the Church can identify himself with it in that spirit of affection which breeds the masterpiece.

Moreover the lot of the Catholic writer is very hard indeed. Normally he cannot afford to ignore the markedly puritanical spirit which still pervades many of his brethren in the faith, because these wield an energetic battle-ax which is all the more effective because it is swung from ambush. I have observed with considerable interest, during the past two years, the progress of a private campaign against one of the most gifted of living Catholic poets. The two people most prominent in it never wrote a word for the press, but sent out scores of letters which created suspicion and even some fear. Generally, for the sake of smoothing the fur of these self-constituted tigers for the defense of "standards," the author must perforce assume that innocuous and devious

"perfection" which is to literature what frost is to landscape. One great need, therefore, is a powerful and competent criticism exercised by men who blend the best endowments of humanism with the fervor of belief.

That in turn - from the viewpoint of reception no less than from the vantage-ground of expression - depends upon a dozen factors more or less identical with culture. I am not convinced that these are going to be operative in the immediate future. American Catholics will probably continue to devote the greater portion of their intellectual effort to apologetic, first because that is so much needed, and secondly because they are in the habit of doing so. For a time, following the lead of Father Tabb, we witnessed a renaissance of poetry; but splendid though the radiance was - a bonfire of the energies of writers like Thomas Walsh, the Kilmers and T. A. Daly, it is now a thing of the past. Such good verse as remains issues from the convent and the cloister - an indication that Catholic civilization in the United States is well-nigh reduced to the terms of the early centuries, when monastic walls were the only bulwarks against barbarism.

There is, however, no doubt that in the spiritual as well as in the mechanical world need engenders creative effort. The contemporary era is one which may honestly be described as especially in need of Christian vitality. I refer not so much to any collapse of morals (for the constraints imposed by an economic system based on sharp competition render flagrant indulgence impossible for very many), but rather to the profound soul-hunger which is everywhere so manifest to anyone who has an eye for such things. An unsatisfied thirst for permanence in hope, for the reliable in faith, for the unchangeable in charity, has taken possession of many whose fathers were blandly optimistic about the progress of science, or the perfectibility of the race. And precisely because the Catholic Church is the storehouse of so much light and virtue, even the world which cannot bring itself to acknowledge ecclesiastical authority or to recognize the validity of religious dogma will borrow from that Church with an ever-increasing sense of indebtedness. That a great number particularly among the intellectual have gone into debt, for truth or beauty, to the Catholic heritage during the past decades is one of the outstanding facts of recent history. Such a process cannot

be halted. The animal feeds when it is hungry, however great may be the perils of the search; but the soul of man is the most persistent of hunters, spurred on as it is by a craving the intensity of which can be judged from saints on the one hand and fanatics on the other.

It seems to me paltry to estimate the future of Catholic letters on any other basis than this. One might "promote" the sale of books, thus enlarging the audience of readers for such volumes as the immediate past has offered. Or again, a group of practically minded writers might succeed in turning out copy with a greater "popular appeal" - a literature for the layman, in the current phrase. But all such pseudo-mechanical devices never have had, never will have, a near relationship to art or discovery. That which Longinus described nearly two thousand years ago as the "sublime" abides as the only yeast with which a literature has been made to rise. For memorable speech, which moves the heart and enlightens the mind of man, is always the litany of a pilgrimage to the ultimates. I am optimistic enough to believe that in the modern world a great throng is making such a journey, half unconsciously, along the road mapped out by the Church of Holy God - *Ecclesia sancti Dei*.

About This EBook

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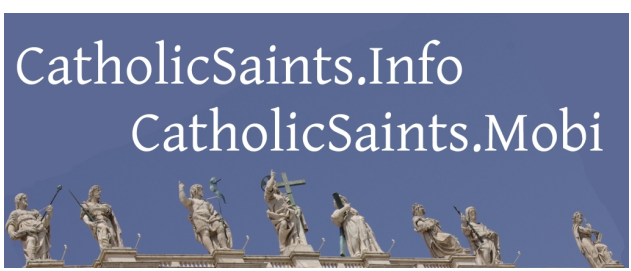
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